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Illinois Issues

A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

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Peggy Boyer Long



The future of journalism rests on the best of the old and the new

by Peggy Boyer Long

Who would have guessed it. Reporters for a monthly print magazine won a national award in online beat reporting.

Illinois Issues' Statehouse Bureau Chief Bethany Carson (now Jaeger) and our Public Affairs Reporting intern Deaneese Williams-Harris took the top prize in that category at this summer's conference of Capitolbeat, the national association of capitol reporters and editors. They won for the blog they produced several times each day as the spring legislative session ground its way into serious overtime. (We shut it down in August just long enough to give Bethany time to get married and take a honeymoon — but more on that later.)

Second and third place awards in online beat reporting went to reporters at Stateline.org, a must-read national online news service covering the states. I can't resist noting that one of those reporters, Daniel C. Vock, also is a regular contributor to our magazine.

Illinois Issues took honors in print journalism, as well. Charles N. Wheeler III, our *Ends and Means* columnist, won his fourth first place award in magazine commentary. Bethany won second place in that category for her column *State of the*

State. She also won a third place in magazine single report for her story on the Illinois Commerce Commission, "Small panel, major players," which appeared in this year's February edition. The first and second place awards went to reporters for *The Texas Observer* and *CommonWealth Magazine* in Boston.

Capitolbeat, formerly known as ACRE, is the only national association of capitol bureau reporters and editors. It was founded in 1999 and now has 250 members in statehouses throughout the country.

The awards were announced last month in Philadelphia.

Illinois Issues *has won* several awards from the group over the years, including one for general excellence in state government reporting, but this year's trophies were especially satisfying. The combination of print and online honors comes as our staff — as is the case with most journalists these days — wrestles with the evolving relationship between print and online media.

We do believe this relationship, if approached strategically, can support what we have always done by benefiting Illinoisans who want and need to know more about their state

government. As a result, we have been undergoing an evolution of our own, making changes we think will help deliver more information to more readers in more ways.

We launched our Statehouse blog this year and continue to debate the best use of this new medium in the context of our stated mission to provide in-depth reporting and analysis of politics, policy and governance. It's not an automatic fit, as you can imagine. Print and online users are reading for different reasons and in different ways. But we think our blog does a pretty fair job of bridging this divide by blending detailed reporting in shorter bites with descriptive color.

If you haven't seen it, go to our Web site at <http://illinoisissues.nis.edu> and click on the orange bar at the top of the page.

It's a work in progress. To this point, we've concluded that, at a minimum, a blog can enhance the value of the magazine to our readers by filling the information gaps between monthly editions. It has enabled us to keep up with breaking news and offer even more context than we can provide in the magazine. Through the blog we have a greater capacity to link to such back-

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ground information as key documents and public statements — in time to be most useful to readers.

This much seems clear to our staff and to the members of our Advisory Board: *Illinois Issues Online* can and should become known as *the* first place to go for resources on state policy questions.

On this we're clear, too: Our purpose dictates that any information we provide, whether it be online or in print, meets best practice standards for reporting and editing, including accuracy, fairness and transparency.

Our blog, in short, is not designed as a source of personal opinion or gossip.

Still, a blog is a more intimate and immediate medium, making it attractive and useful to some who might not otherwise read about state government and politics. A blog is by nature more conversational in tone and offers a real-time, you-are-there Statehouse experience, making it more fun to produce, as well. To that end, we're working toward audio and video capability that would enable us to let our readers see and hear policymakers for themselves.

But we're planning a bigger change over the next few months.

This December, *Illinois Issues* will launch the magazine's first online-only edition. That issue, which will appear on our Web site each December, will be devoted to breaking news, especially political campaign news. This year, it will give us a jump on

coverage of the state's first February primary. Next year, it will give us a chance to report the results of the November election more quickly.

As our readers know, the December issue has been devoted to the arts over the past decade. Now, the arts will be folded into our combined July/August culture and environment issue.

The move was designed in part to save on printing costs during the holidays when readership is low anyway. This decision hasn't been an easy one, but as a primarily print magazine, we're subject to the shifting economics of publishing — a reality faced by print journalists everywhere. We need to cut our costs and increase our prices, so we're boosting our single-copy price from \$3.95 to \$5.00.

Our subscribers won't see a price increase, though. They'll receive 10 issues of the magazine each year, plus a free copy of our *Roster of State Government Officials*, for the same low price of \$39.95. Then we hope they'll read us online each December for that 11th issue.

And that brings us to a key reason we're launching the online issue: to encourage our print-only readers to check us out online and to nudge our online-only readers toward the magazine. We believe it's precisely this kind of cross-fertilization between the "old" and the "new" media that will ensure the survival of serious journalism into the future. □

Peggy Boyer Long can be reached at peggyboy@aol.com.

Double congrats

Meet Bethany Jaeger

It wasn't easy to cover an extended legislative session this summer *and* get married. But our Statehouse Bureau Chief Bethany Carson is a master of organization. She married Eric Jaeger August 4 and headed off for a honeymoon in Germany. She's back this month with a new name. Best, best wishes to Bethany and Eric from *Illinois Issues*' staff and family.

Diana Nelson promoted

Art Director Diana L. C. Nelson was promoted to creative director of Campus Services at the University of Illinois at Springfield. She's responsible for managing creative elements across the spectrum of media developed and produced by the university's offices of public relations, marketing, Web and print. Fortunately, she'll continue to oversee the design of *Illinois Issues*.

Illinois Issues

A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

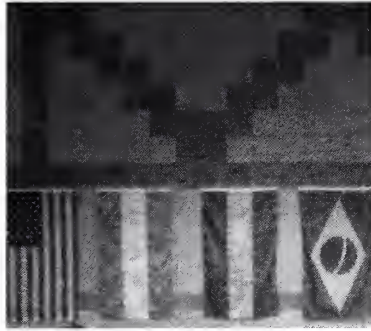
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Credits: Our cover photograph of the state Capitol rotunda railing was taken by Terry Farmer. The cover and the issue were designed by Diana L.C. Nelson.

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Bethany Jaeger



How did we get here, and where are we headed?

by Bethany Jaeger

The state's top lawmakers didn't play nice in the sandbox this year. They threw temper tantrums and blamed each other for the lengthening stalemate over the state budget.

At the end of July, they even excluded Gov. Rod Blagojevich from closed-door negotiating sessions, a sign of frustration over his short attention span and his mind-boggling persistence in pushing an unpopular wish list.

Who could win on this? The stalemate ended up leading to the longest overtime session in Illinois legislative history, bruising state government's image in the process, says John Jackson, a visiting professor of political science at Southern Illinois University's Paul Simon Public Policy Institute.

In addition to failing to address issues important to constituents' everyday lives — skyrocketing electricity rates being the most prominent — Jackson says negative opinions about the state's political leadership worsened amid “the wrangling and the personal animosity that [seemed] to be the No. 1 story almost every day.”

Another spoiler in this unhappy tale is Blagojevich. His uncompromising stance struck out with House Speaker Michael Madigan, a fellow Democrat who methodically eliminated each of the governor's proposals from the table and remained locked on trimming the state's revenue and spending priorities.

Fueling discord, Blagojevich issued ultimatums while legislative leaders continued to negotiate the budget without him. Of course, the legislative leaders also remained entrenched in their own agendas.

Senate President Emil Jones Jr. played a problematic role, too, by aligning himself with Blagojevich from the start in hopes of getting more money for education.

Yet Jones' support wasn't enough to advance the governor's proposals through his own chamber because his Democratic Caucus was far from unified, negating the 37-member majority that could have been used to approve a state budget without Republican votes.

Still, after voting for a one-month budget to cover July, lawmakers did approve — by an overwhelming, bipartisan majority in both chambers — a \$59 billion fiscal year 2008 basic operations budget. A capital plan was left in the drawer. That was August 10.

The story doesn't end there, though.

As the State Fair got into full swing in Springfield, the governor hadn't signed the budget or vetoed it outright. Instead, he announced he would cut \$500 million and target those dollars for uninsured Illinoisans. But in his maneuvering, Blagojevich stuck it to lawmakers by eliminating \$200 million in “pork” projects in their districts. We won't read the next installment, courtesy of lawmakers, until later.

The governor has been at odds with the General Assembly all session. The spring momentum on proposals to overhaul school finance and pay down public employee pension debt stalled because the governor threatened to veto any increases in income or sales taxes to cover the additional costs.

Fueling discord, Blagojevich issued ultimatums while legislative leaders continued to negotiate the budget without him. Of course, the legislative leaders also remained entrenched in their own agendas. By early August, a government shutdown loomed.

The discord dates to the governor's first term, but it worsened when he introduced his fifth state budget proposal in March. Blagojevich wanted to use a so-called gross receipts tax to fund a multibillion-dollar program providing state-sponsored health insurance to adults. He also wanted to levy a smaller tax on businesses that have more than 10 employees and don't offer health

insurance to pay for the program. Business groups framed the plan as the largest tax increase in Illinois history.

Political scientist Kent Redfield says any major tax increase would have been hard to swallow, but Blagojevich's approach would have required an even bigger gulp.

"He has done the absolute world's worst job of both preparing people for those proposals and negotiating those proposals," says Redfield, a professor of political studies with the Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Springfield. "His leadership style and negotiating style makes a bad situation worse."

The gross receipts tax, which would have taxed all business revenues rather than profits, was estimated to net \$7.6 billion a year in revenue for the state. However, it generated so much negative press that the House rejected the idea on a nonbinding vote of 107 to 0.

The governor didn't flinch. He stayed on message throughout the summer: Approve his form of universal health care for adults or forget his signature on other items important to leaders, including funding for education and mass transit.

But a string of accusations and ultimatums failed. Even after introducing a scaled-back health care plan, Blagojevich lacked legislative approval to get that plan into the state budget. And though lawmakers cut the governor out of budget negotiations, Blagojevich never stopped campaigning for his spending priorities.

While he held a news conference in Chicago about health insurance, for instance, leaders met in Springfield to discuss expansion of gaming as a way to fund education and construction projects. Meeting without the governor, they said, was more productive.

"We had less speeches, and I think that comes with less antagonism," said Senate Minority Leader Frank Watson after that meeting. "He's obviously the governor of this state, but it was a more business-like meeting."

Neither Republican nor Democratic leaders appreciated Blagojevich's overtime game plan, which started with a series of hours-long presentations given by the governor's "guest speakers."

"Pretty much more of the same,"

The speaker may use the overtime session, however it turns out, as a warning to the governor: Tame your wish list or prepare to play hardball for three more years.

House Minority Leader Tom Cross said after one of the June budget meetings when speakers talked about tax increment financing districts in Chicago. "It's getting to the point [that] it's rather embarrassing and a bit disgusting."

To combat irrelevancy in the public's eye, Blagojevich resorted to bashing lawmakers for not working hard enough and threatening to keep the legislature in mandatory "special sessions" seven days a week until a budget landed on his desk.

Lawmakers were unfazed by his threats. They simply stopped showing up. Attendance dropped to a handful in some sessions.

Blagojevich also turned on his public relations machine and blamed Madigan, in particular, for the impasse, challenging his Democratic loyalty.

"It's kind of tough to get the speaker to come out from the shadows and make his opinions known because he likes to hide [with] his Republican friends and his Republican allies," Blagojevich told reporters after a July budget meeting in the Executive Mansion. "The speaker needs to break his alliance with the conservative Republicans and be a Democrat again. If the speaker does that, we can be out of here tomorrow."

Madigan fired his own public criticism.

"It appears to me that certain people are grasping at straws in terms of what they perceive to be a budget debate," Madigan said in one instance. "And I would say again, only one chamber has passed a budget. That is the House."

Madigan repeatedly referred to that early version of a House budget, which allowed for limited growth and had some of the necessary Republican support. But it was dead on arrival in the Senate.

As late as August 1, the governor sent a letter to legislative leaders of both parties stressing again that he wouldn't sign a

budget that lacked key components of his original proposal, including more money for health care, education, pension reform and transportation.

"A 'take-it-or-leave-it' approach on a 12-month budget, sent to me as a government shutdown looms, will do nothing more than simply precipitate such a shutdown," he wrote.

Behind the scenes at the Statehouse, Blagojevich bypassed the legislature to maneuver his spending priorities into the budget approved by both chambers. He's done it before. In his first term, he skirted the need for legislative approval by issuing an executive order that dedicated millions of state dollars to controversial stem cell research.

True to style again this year, he never backed down from his grandiose wish list. Despite all evidence that lawmakers objected to most items, he was willing to stick it out as long as it took to get some form of what he wanted.

At press time, neither chamber had officially adjourned the spring session. That left the door open for additional spending or borrowing plans. A long-awaited capital budget, for instance, would fund road and school construction. The fall session also is right around the corner. Lawmakers and the governor could continue to hash out differences then.

But the damage likely has already been done to Blagojevich's agenda. His loss of credibility could work to his opponents' advantage throughout his second term.

The speaker may use this overtime session, however it turns out, as a warning to the governor: Tame your wish list and be willing to negotiate or prepare to play hardball for three more years.

"If the speaker wanted to get state spending under control and not hand the governor a big pot of new money to spend, then being in the situation we're in does, I think, work strategically to the speaker's advantage," Redfield says.

He adds that while the goal is to craft a balanced state budget, it's also to "settle the relationships between the legislature and the executive — and the speaker and the governor — so we don't have to spend three months leading up to this again a year from now." □

Bethany Jaeger can be reached at capitolbureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

WHERE IS IT?

Maps speak a universal language. They often tell us as much about a culture, a time and a people as about a geographic location.

More than 120 such maps, part of an exhibition ranging from rare works of art to interactive digital displays, will speak to visitors this fall at Chicago's Field Museum. "People have always been mapping to explain the world around them," says Todd Tubutis, the Field's permanent exhibitions manager.

Maps: Finding Our Place in the World, organized by the museum and the Newberry Library, includes charts created by traders and navigators, by such scientists as Ptolemy and Leonardo da Vinci and by writers, including J.R.R. Tolkien. The exhibit also includes high-tech mapping by Internet pioneers.

Like the exhibition, a companion book, published by the University of Chicago and edited by James Akerman and Robert Karrow Jr., looks at the functions of maps, from wayfinding to ways maps are linked to historical events, from maps of fictional worlds to directions from a GPS computer.

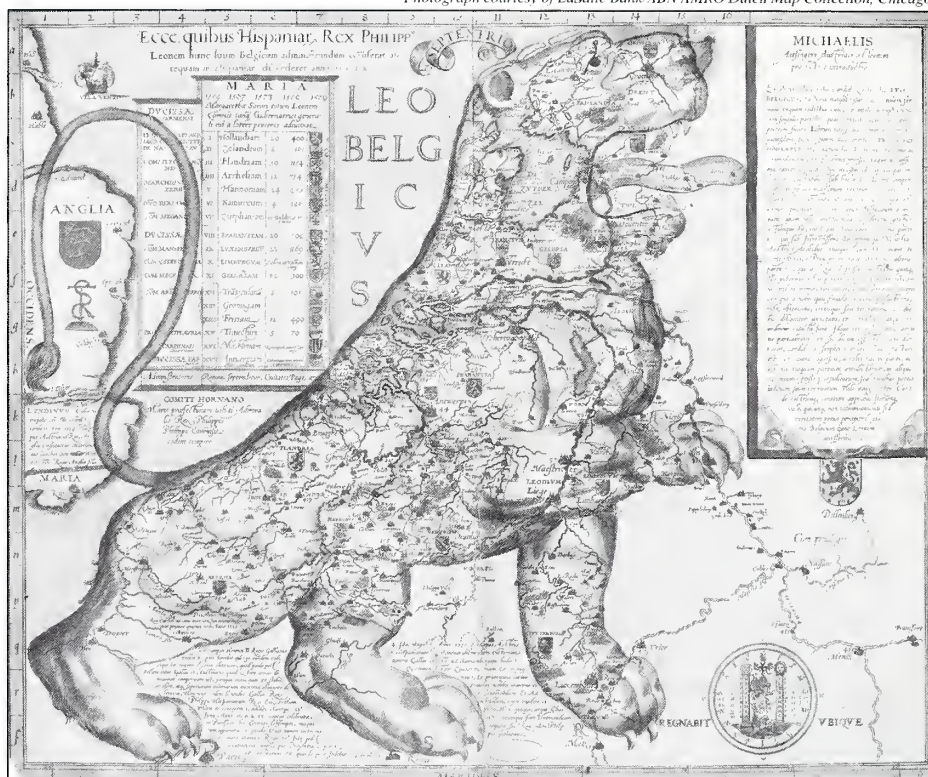
Today, maps are largely digital, says Tubutis. They are available on hand-held devices, on phones, on computers and in our cars. "They are really doing the same things maps have been doing for centuries — they help us get around, showing us our neighborhoods, telling us things that are important to us, whether it is real estate or attractions or the nearest Starbucks."

Tubutis compares the ephemeral nature of digital mapping to one of his favorite entries in the show: a lady's palm-size guide to London's 1851 Crystal Palace Exposition — an early hand-held device, he jokes. But the "throwaway" nature of the souvenir makes its entry in the exhibition more valuable. Because so many of today's maps are never saved or stored, he and others who appreciate maps wonder how much will be left to tell future generations where we were going and why.

Meanwhile, visitors still have a chance to translate these older maps. The exhibition runs from November 2 to January 27, 2008.

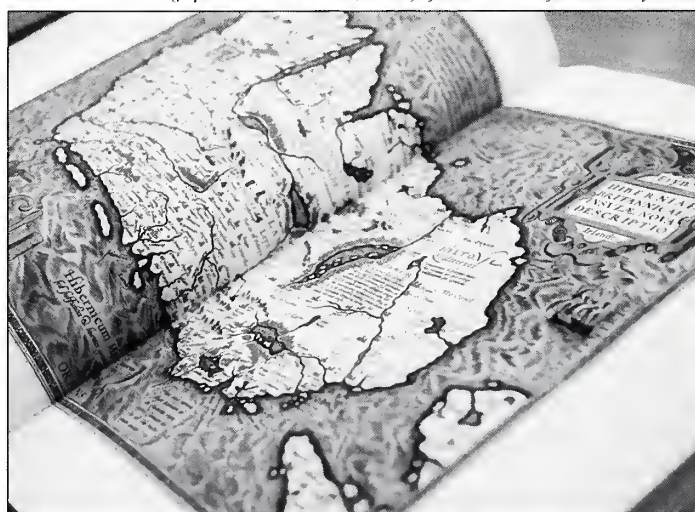
Beverly Scobell

Photograph courtesy of LaSalle Bank/ABN AMRO Dutch Map Collection, Chicago



"In the 16th century, relations between the northern and southern Netherlands were fraying. Looking to produce an image that would cement national unity, Michael von Aitzing turned to 'the strongest of animals' for inspiration. The profile of his roaring lion matches that of the country. Only the tips of its paws and tail extend beyond Dutch borders," according to the Field Museum.

Photograph © The Field Museum, courtesy of the Collections of The Newberry Library



The Field Museum's exhibition, Maps: Finding Our Place in the World, will allow visitors to see how mapmaking technologies continue to evolve. Pictured is the Theatro de la Tierra Universal.

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

Lincoln museum logs major gift

Among the 1,500 items donated to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum by philanthropist Louise Taper is a page from a "sum book" where a 15-year-old Lincoln did math problems and wrote doggerel verse. It's one of Director Rick Beard's favorite pieces in the vast collection, which is worth millions. "I like that piece a lot. It reminds you this is a guy who was largely self-educated, who was just absolutely determined to rise through his own effort."

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation, which bought part of the collection and acquired the rest as a gift, will not reveal its value at Taper's request. The foundation negotiated with Taper for four years to get the collection, which will eventually be deeded to the state as a gift to the people of Illinois.

The collection has some high-profile pieces, including a pair of bloodstained gloves and a piece of the shirt Lincoln wore the night he was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth.

But Taper's focus throughout her 30-plus years of collecting historical objects was on documents — about 1,200 of the 1,500 pieces — and correspondence.

"Basically what you have coming to us is the best privately held collection of Lincoln materials in the world," says State Historian Tom Schwartz, who catalogued the items on roughly 230 pages. He says scholars, particularly those interested in Booth and Mary Todd Lincoln, will find the material useful.

"I haven't sat down and gone through it enough to let you know what kind of hidden gems are there," Schwartz says.

"It certainly has tremendous research potential." Among the documents are 80 unpublished letters of Mary Todd Lincoln, including many from her post-assassination travels in Europe.

"It gives a sense that she's obviously much more involved with life and interacting with people. This notion of her being crazy and mad is based upon a sense that she's more isolated from people," Schwartz says. "What these letters show is that she's engaged. She could be very mean-spirited. A good hater. We know all of that. It also shows she can be very generous."

"What the collection really does allow you to do is look at Lincoln as a man and an individual, a father, a husband. It really allows us to go even further than the museum already does in terms of personalizing Lincoln. It's good to remember that the Great Emancipator had a wife with whom sparks flew on a regular basis and that he had four children, two of whom died during his lifetime, and the kind of everyday things that we deal with."

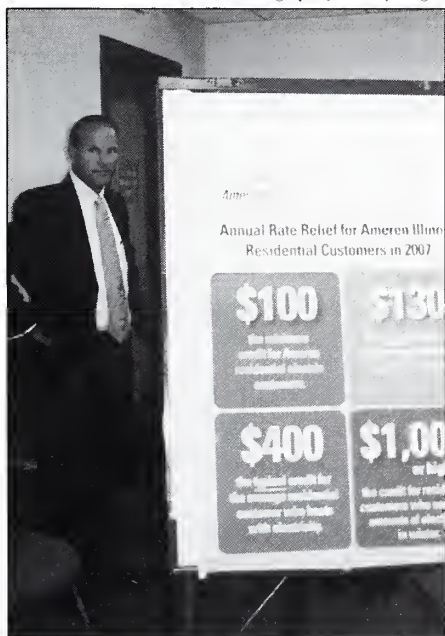
Previously, the Ford's Theater section of the museum had few original artifacts, but now, Beard says, the museum has many Booth items, including love letters Booth wrote to paramours in Boston.

"He was very popular, very much embraced by the ladies," Beard says. "It's interesting to have people understand that this would be the equivalent of a Brad Pitt or a George Clooney assassinating the president today."

*Chris Wetterich
reporter for the Springfield State Journal-Register*

Scenes from a seemingly endless session

Photograph by Bethany Jaeger

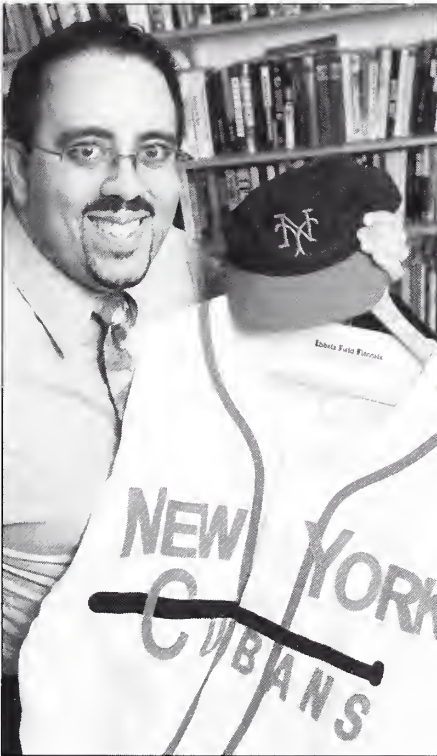


Ameren Illinois President and CEO Scott Cisel announces a rate relief plan agreed upon with state lawmakers. Gov. Rod Blagojevich was mulling it in mid-August.

Photograph by Bethany Jaeger



Reporters wait in late July outside of Sen. President Emil Jones Jr.'s office during closed-door state budget negotiations. Lawmakers sent Gov. Rod Blagojevich a \$59 billion budget August 10. He cut it by \$500 million; Jones chose not call it for a Senate override vote.



*Adrian Burgos, a professor of history at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is the author of *Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line*. Burgos writes about racial and ethnic tensions that Latinos faced when incorporated into the game of baseball. Prior to integration, he writes, the vast share of Latino players participated in the Negro Leagues.*

QUOTABLE

“It is astonishing that after signing four budgets, billions of dollars out of balance, the governor is now finding a moral objection to a potentially out of balance budget while threatening to shut down state government in the process. The governor’s hypocrisy knows no bounds.”

Illinois Comptroller Daniel Hynes in an August 1 press release during the politically bumpy and seemingly endless negotiations over a new state budget.

NOT THAT BAD?

Chicago scores improve in the later grades

For nearly two decades, the Chicago Public Schools system fought a reputation of being the “worst in the nation.” Bestowed in 1987 by former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett, the unflattering moniker stuck like a stubborn piece of gum that can’t be scraped from the underside of a classroom desk.

But a recent study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago finds the flailing system could be doing some things right.

Overall, the research finds, Chicago Public Schools’ relative performance is better in upper grades than in lower grades when compared to students in public schools in the rest of Illinois — particularly among African-American and Latino students. Contrary to long-held stereotypes, the study’s conclusion notes, this finding suggests that longer enrollment in the city’s school system leads to better relative performance, rather than worse, as has been previously suggested.

The study is careful to say that more data over a longer time period is needed to fully test this assertion. But findings so far strongly suggest the pattern.

The gap in reading scores between Chicago and other public districts’ students, the study finds, is considerably smaller for eighth-grade students than it is for third-graders. What’s more, when African-American students are considered separately, “that gap has not only disappeared but reversed, with Chicago’s African-American students outscoring their counterparts in the rest of Illinois by one point,” the study finds.

“In the past, it had been common for observers to claim that students fell further behind the longer they were enrolled in the [Chicago Public Schools]. The evidence suggests the contrary, at least relative to the rest of Illinois. [O]n the whole, students in upper grades are not as behind as students in lower grades.”

“I was totally surprised,” says John Easton, an author of the study and executive director of the consortium. He is quick to point out that large differences remain between African-American and Latino students on one hand and white and Asian students on the other.

The study bundles all other Illinois districts together, rather than breaking out their performances individually, though Easton acknowledges that more research allowing for such comparisons would be useful.

In the end, the report may well spur as many questions as it answers.

“What comes next is the ‘why?’” says Rebekah Levin, a senior researcher with the University of Illinois at Chicago’s College of Education. “I would like to see more quantitative analysis looking at data and class, and who is leaving the Chicago system.”

*Jennifer Halperin
freelance writer, Oak Park*

BUDGET DRAMATICS

On August 15, Gov. Rod Blagojevich announced intentions to cut dollars and shift priorities in the \$59 billion spending plan for state operations that lawmakers sent him after overwhelming, bipartisan passage in both chambers. The governor said he planned to cut \$200 million in legislative initiatives, which some call pork, and trim or move another \$300 million in what he labeled special interest funding. He said he would expand eligibility for health care subsidies for low-income, uninsured Illinoisans and boost spending on that initiative by some \$500 million.

Senate President Emil Jones Jr., who joined the governor when he made the statement, said he wouldn’t call for a vote in his chamber to restore the cuts. Unless both chambers vote to do that, the fiscal year 2008 operations budget, minus the cuts, will take effect.

The operations budget as approved by the governor, appropriates \$610 million for elementary and secondary education, increasing the minimum amount spent per student by \$400. The budget also meets the state’s obligation for funding all five public employee pension systems.

At press time, lawmakers hadn’t announced whether they would return to address a capital budget or spending for the Chicago Transit Authority, and the governor hadn’t made any of the details of his health care plan public.

The Editors

HOUSE HUNT

An affordable home

At some point in their lives, nearly everyone rents — people starting careers, empty nesters and people in transition.

In fact, four out of 10 families living in Cook County rent their homes, according to a report, *The State of Rental Housing in Cook County*, produced by the DePaul Real Estate Center. But those families are in real danger of losing their homes or of having to pay more than they can afford to stay in Cook County.

The study shows that, if trends continue, by 2020, the county would lose 78,000 affordable rental units — those costing about \$750 a month, an amount a family of four making \$30,000 a year can pay. Recognizing a need to turn that trend around, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation paired with the Urban Land Institute to create the Preservation Compact, an extensive array of initiatives aimed at preserving existing rental housing in Cook County. Raising \$100 million to help finance the projects is a cornerstone of the compact.

Armed with \$50 million so far, along with an action plan with specific goals delegated to people who can accomplish them, the compact is well on its way to preserving those homes, says Julia Stasch, vice president of the MacArthur Foundation. “This is a solvable problem, not one of those where you say, ‘Can we ever make a difference?’” Stasch says, adding that each initiative is under way and

the group hopes to raise a second \$50 million by year’s end.

Other initiatives include offering grants or loans for rental property owners; creating an interagency council to coordinate programs among city, county, state and federal agencies; founding a clearinghouse on rental housing data run by DePaul’s center as an early warning system for properties at risk of being lost; providing technical assistance and loans for energy-efficient improvements to rental buildings; assisting tenants with training, technical support and legal services; and giving a property tax break to all affordable rental buildings.

In Cook County, a typical rental property is an older, small, multi-family building, says Susanne

COOK COUNTY	
Housing units	2 million
Rental units	835,000
Renters	
51 percent earn less than \$30,000	
Owners	
19 percent earn less than \$30,000	
Renters	
12 percent earn more than \$75,000	
Owners	
42 percent earn more than \$ 75,000	
Rental stock	
<i>Built before 1960</i>	
Cook County	60 percent
Nation	32 percent
SOURCE: The Preservation Compact	

Cannon, the Douglas and Cynthia Crocker endowed director at DePaul’s Real Estate Center. “The properties are vulnerable to being converted to condominiums or, at the other end of the spectrum, they can fall into disrepair because they are expensive to maintain,” she says. “We have a remarkably good stock of apartments available at \$750 a month.”

The loss of those homes leads to problems for renters who either live beyond their means to stay in Cook County, double up in less-attractive quarters or move farther from their jobs. In turn, that affects traffic and the availability of workers to take low- and moderate-paying jobs in the county, Cannon says.

Creators hope the Preservation Compact can serve as a model for the rest of the country.

“There are examples of funds in other cities, but this is unique because it brings together many different parties from academia, philanthropies and the private sector and deals with information-sharing and financing,” says Mary White Vasys, Urban Land Institute’s vice chair for the compact.

“We have a lofty goal, but we’ll be able to do it.”

Kristy Kennedy
freelance writer, Naperville

EDUCATION NEGLECTED

While most of the largest court jurisdictions in Illinois tend to leave truants to local school districts, at least one downstate court is putting heat on parents.

The first educational neglect case came before Judge Tim Olson in Morgan County’s juvenile court in 2002. Two dozen followed. In one of his first cases in that west-central Illinois county, he removed a Jacksonville woman’s custody of her 7-year-old son, who had missed 22 days of school.

The move has had an impact. Since Olson started enforcing educational neglect charges against parents, the truancy rate in the Jacksonville elementary school, where the problem was most serious, dropped from 16.9 percent to 3.4 percent in 2006, according to the state’s School Report Card.

But most other jurisdictions, including Cook County and the largest of the surrounding counties, tend not to prosecute parents for educational neglect, preferring to leave the matter to local districts to resolve.

In Illinois, children ages 7 to 17 are required to go to school. A student with 18 unexcused absences, or 10 percent of the school year, is considered a chronic truant. The crime is a misdemeanor, with parents subject to not more than 30 days imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$500.

“The way we approach it is that if you are 13 or older, it’s probably truancy. If you are 12 or younger, it’s likely the parent is not consciously making an effort,” says Morgan County Assistant State’s Attorney Robert V. Bonjean III.

The State Board of Education doesn’t track such cases, and local counties and regional superintendents of schools aren’t required to do so.

The Chicago Public Schools system, which has a truancy rate of 3.2 percent, views the courts as a last resort, says Joi Meeks, a district spokeswoman. Chicago counselors call parents after five absences, and make home visits after 10. If those attempts are unsuccessful, the district calls for an internal hearing, which is overseen by a retired judge hired by the district. Only after two such hearings fail do the counselors consider referring the cases to the court system.

Such cases are rare-to-nonexistent in DuPage and Lake counties, as well.

Sheila Merry, executive director of the Jane Addams Juvenile Court Foundation, a not-for-profit agency that works with the Cook County juvenile court system, agrees with that approach.

“We do not think locking parents up is an effective strategy,” she says. “We prefer engaging parents in the school system and better outreach.”

Darrin Burnett
reporter for the Jacksonville Journal-Courier

Photograph courtesy of the University of Illinois at Chicago



Crocheters in the Chicago area have helped create a replica of a section of the Australian Great Barrier Reef to be displayed by the Chicago Cultural Center in October as a part of the Chicago Humanities Festival. Crocheters were initially introduced to the project at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum at the University of Illinois at Chicago by a pair of Australian sisters whose interest spurred the project. Crocheting was chosen because its stitches and shapes can demonstrate the complexity of coral and other aquatic forms.

Charters don't cost

The Civic Federation of Chicago, in a recent study based on a limited sample, found that the state's charter schools did not negatively impact those school districts' budgets.

The Civic Federation studied the three oldest charter schools outside of Chicago that are still in operation. The researchers looked at the financial history of the host districts, including revenue from state, federal and local sources, per pupil operating costs and the funds transferred to the charter school.

The nonpartisan government research organization's study was funded by the McCormick Tribune Foundation and the Chester Foundation.

Schools go green

Environmental preservation groups across Illinois have developed programs aimed at reacquainting kids with Mother Nature. And the state is supporting the move.

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn's Rain Garden Initiative provides small grants to schools and community groups. The grants are used to construct and maintain landscaped areas planted with native species that conserve water by managing storm runoff, preventing flooding and acting as natural filters.

"[W]e're all stewards of God's earth," says Quinn. "If you look at the Illinois Constitution, it says it's the duty of every person to provide and maintain a healthful environment for this and future generations."

Melinda Pruett-Jones, executive director of the nonprofit Chicago Wilderness, agrees. "If the younger generation grows up having no connection to the land," she says, "they're not going to have any interest in preserving it in the future, and that upsets the balance between having a green and healthy environment for quality of life and sustainable growth." Pruett-Jones' consortium recently launched an initiative called "Leave No Child Inside."

Frances Kuo, an environmental psychologist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has studied the impact of natural, green spaces on kids' behavior. "Every indication is that nature really is good for kids and that it enhances their functioning and development in myriad ways," Kuo says. "[One] of the good outcomes that have been linked with exposure to green spaces of various kinds is a higher likelihood of growing up with a commitment to protect the environment."

The Rain Garden Initiative has borne fruit. "I know it works," says Julie Ann Bice, seventh-grade life science teacher at West Prairie Middle School in Colchester and adviser to the school's Garden Club. "Every day, when I pull up to school in the morning, the kids are there working in the garden."

Bice, whose school received one of the 18 \$500 rain garden grants distributed this year, instructs her students to spend dozens of hours in the school's garden throughout the year to study the life cycle of the monarch butterfly, which is coincidentally the state insect.

"It gets to be a really emotional thing for them because they're not just observing something; it's theirs and they're becoming part of nature," she says. "I tell my seventh-graders that we really can't do much about saving whales and tigers, but as far as actually doing something to be part of the solution, we can do this with the butterfly."

That students understand they can have a real and lasting effect speaks to the heart of the program, says Marc Miller, senior policy adviser for the lieutenant governor's clean water programs.

"Taking a grass lot and turning it into a natural area will capture their imagination, but also they can see the impact they have — they see that these native plants benefit nature because other animals are attracted to and take advantage of them," Miller says. "It's a sense of place developed right in the schoolyard, which gets them thinking about what those species are, where these places are and what they can do."

Robin Huiras
freelance writer, Evergreen Park

Illinois is slower in job growth

Other states are ahead of Illinois in job creation, notes a recent study by the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois.

Nonfarm employment in Illinois rose by only 3 percent between 1996 and 2005. That lags behind six other Midwestern states and behind the national average of nearly 12 percent, wrote Geoffrey Hewings, an economics and geography professor.

"It is not clear why the state's growth rates have lagged behind those in the nation," Hewings wrote, though one factor seems to be that 40 percent of Illinois exports go to other Midwestern states that also have slow employment growth rates. "With both population and the labor force expanding, the inability of the state's economy to grow jobs presents a major challenge for policymakers."

NIU student interns gather on their movie set

Photographs courtesy of Laura Vazquez, Northern Illinois University



Six Northern Illinois University media studies students spent five weeks as interns on Slipstream, a film directed and written by its star Anthony Hopkins. The Chicago Film Festival will present the movie in October. Slipstream's producer, Robert Katz, is a 1987 graduate of NIU. Hopkins poses with the students — Becca Berry, Jeff Negus, Michael Gentile, Dan Marder, Tim Piper and Mark Hoffmeister — and their instructor, Laura Vazquez.



Becca Berry hands out call sheets for a day of shooting.



The students rotated duties that included working on the camera crew, sound engineering and special effects.



The outer office

Lobbyists will be back at the rail. And likely in greater numbers

Analysis by Aaron Chambers

Photograph by Terry Farmer

What do electric utilities, cable television and gambling casinos have in common? They're all good for business — the lobbying business, that is.

As Illinois' spring legislative session dragged into summer, lawmakers deliberated on some of the key issues that always attract the attention of professional advocates who are paid to represent special interests. They work toward one of three objectives, or some combination: get something for the client; prevent the client from losing something; or get something back that the client has already lost.

Lobbyists for cable giant Comcast swarmed the Capitol last spring in an unsuccessful attempt to fend off AT&T, whose own battalion of hired guns worked to wedge the telecom into the Illinois cable business by pre-empting agreements between incumbent cable providers and local governments. Meanwhile, Commonwealth Edison's lobbyists worked to block — or at least dilute — a plan to roll back rate hikes the company implemented this year.

When the Illinois House approved a deal requiring ComEd and Ameren, the electric utility serving much of central and southern Illinois, to offer \$1 billion in rate relief to their customers, ComEd's team rejoiced that they kept the damage to a minimum. The following day, the *Springfield State Journal-Register* published a photo of a ComEd lobbyist, Courtney Nottage, smiling from ear to ear. The image said it all: ComEd had won.

Throughout the spring and into the

summer, lobbyists jammed the railing on the second floor of the state Capitol. Nottage had plenty of company in a business that, at least on paper, is booming in Illinois. According to data from Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White's office, annual registrations of lobbying firms have grown steadily since 2000. The self-styled Third House grew the most during the first and last years of Gov. Rod Blagojevich's first term. Registrations of lobbyist clients grew, as well. In other words, more businesses, associations and individuals are paying for professional representation before state government.

Meanwhile, the class of organizations that register to lobby for themselves, rather than retain contract lobbyists or lobby for other groups, has plummeted.

Observers say a number of factors fuel this trend. High-profile debates, such as those over the right to provide cable service, draw droves of lobbyists on each side of the fight. And while some of these debates play out over one or two sessions, others, such as whether and how to expand gambling, play out endlessly — keeping dozens of lobbyists fully employed.

The secretary of state's decision last year to require lobbyists to register electronically, rather than on paper, also may have motivated additional registrations. Recent ethics laws tightening disclosure requirements and putting more sunshine on the practice may have played a role, too.

The Blagojevich Administration also has ushered in a new class of lobbyists

— chief among them, the governor's friends. In 2003, the year Blagojevich took office after promising to reform government, the number of lobbying firms registered in Illinois jumped 24 percent, from 263 to 327. In 2006, the last year of Blagojevich's first term, the number of firms registered to lobby jumped a whopping 53 percent, from 323 to 494, after staying roughly flat over the second and third years of his first term.

The number dropped 10 percent this year, but stands at 444 — 69 percent higher than in 2002, the year before Blagojevich took office.

Also during Blagojevich's first year in office, lobbyist client registrations jumped 16 percent, from 1,316 to 1,530. The number climbed through his first term, reaching 1,754 this year.

Pharmaceutical firms, including Johnson & Johnson, Baxter Healthcare Corp., Bristol-Myers Squibb, Glaxo-SmithKline, Pfizer Inc. and Procter & Gamble, also retained lobbyists as Blagojevich increasingly focused his administration on expanding the state's role in providing or facilitating health care, either through government-subsidized programs such as Medicaid or through illegal imports from Canada.

While the ranks of contractual lobbyists and their client rosters grew, the number of entities lobbying for themselves declined. This class dropped 44 percent, from 564 in 2000 to 313 this year. In 2004 alone, it dropped 23 percent, from 555 to 425. It dropped another 20 percent,

Lobbying firms

The number of lobbying firms registered to lobby the Statehouse climbed steadily from 2000 to 2007. As the number of firms climbed, so too did the number of times that those firms appeared in the state's lobbyist registration database. The number of appearances is higher because the lobbying firms, on average, have multiple contracts.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>LOBBYING FIRMS</u>	<u>TIMES IN DATABASE</u>	<u>CONTRACTS PER FIRM</u>
2000	259	1,394	5.38
2001	281	1,308	4.65
2002	263	1,294	4.92
2003	327	1,526	4.67
2004	313	1,511	4.83
2005	323	1,654	5.12
2006	494	1,874	3.79
2007	444	1,820	4.10

SOURCE: Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White's office

from 397 to 318, last year. Many of these organizations — concerns as diverse as Constellation Energy Group, Hawthorne Race Course and the Illinois Soybean Association — enlisted the services of contract lobbyists.

"These trends show me that there is a perception, which is reality, that you have to pay to play in the Blagojevich era," says Sen. Kirk Dillard, a Hinsdale Republican. "It is very concerning that we have an uptick of a couple hundred contractual registrations because it leads one to believe that you must be represented by a lobbyist to have any input into the new Blagojevich Administration."

Dillard argues the increase in contractual lobbyists would have been even greater had the state not raised the annual lobbyist registration fee from \$50 up to \$350 in 2004. He argues that some organizations, which were zealous in registering every employee that could possibly advocate in Springfield, cut their registrations to avoid the higher fees.

Sen. Brad Burzynski, a Clare Republican, echoes Dillard's concern. He says the trend shows that special interests

believe they must penetrate the governor's office — with the help of high-powered lobbyists — to accomplish their goals in Springfield, even though they typically deal directly with state agencies rather than the governor's office.

"It speaks volumes relative to people who were trying to have access to the administration, that in the past might have been able to get something done without having to go through the second floor," he says.

To buttress his image as a populist leader, Blagojevich has consistently criticized the practice of lobbying. Last spring, while promoting his plan for universal health care, he railed against lobbyists on the day the House rejected his proposed business gross receipts tax to pay for it, accusing lawmakers of forgetting their constituents and bowing to the influence of lobbyists eating "fancy steaks" and wearing "Gucci loafers."

But as Blagojevich grew into the role of governor, a series of his pals — individuals with little or no prior experience lobbying the Statehouse — grew from his inner circle into lobbying practices, attracting business from some of the state's most exclusive clients.

These lobbyists, including John Wyma and Milan Petrovic, specialize in gaining access to the governor. Wyma was Blagojevich's chief of staff when Blagojevich served in Congress. Petrovic worked for Blagojevich's 2002 gubernatorial campaign and has since been a fundraiser for the campaign. Others include Lon Monk, a former chief of staff to the governor who managed his campaign last year, and Doug Scofield, who was a spokesman for both of Blagojevich's campaigns for governor and was deputy governor early in Blagojevich's first term.

Sen. Carol Ronen, a Chicago Democrat and close ally of the governor, rejects the notion that Blagojevich fueled the perception that clout rules in Springfield.

"You think that perception was not here before '03? That's ridiculous. That's always been the case in Springfield," she says. "The lobbyists didn't become more influential. They always have been in this process."

She notes that Democrats took control of the Senate in 2003, the same year Blagojevich became governor, and says the sweep intensified interest in connecting with Democrats generally.

Lobbying clients

The number of entities registered as clients of lobbyists also climbed from 2000 to 2007. And as this number grew, so too did the number of times those firms appeared in the state's lobbyist registration database. The number of appearances is higher because the clients, on average, have multiple lobbying firms.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>LOBBYIST CLIENTS</u>	<u>TIMES IN DATABASE</u>	<u>LOBBYISTS PER CLIENT</u>
2000	1,228	1,925	1.57
2001	1,315	1,732	1.32
2002	1,316	1,723	1.31
2003	1,530	2,122	1.39
2004	1,548	2,100	1.36
2005	1,609	2,258	1.40
2006	1,699	2,378	1.40
2007	1,754	2,443	1.39

SOURCE: Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White's office

Democrats already controlled the House.

"What you're seeing is the changing of the guard," she says. "People hire lobbyists that are closer to the Democrats versus the Republicans. That's just kind of a normal thing that happens. It's a natural phenomenon."

There's also a growing sense at the Capitol that it's prudent to retain professional advocates when traversing the increasingly complicated maze of state government. Nothing's a sure bet, though. Cavel International, for instance, lobbied on its own in 2003 and 2004 but hired professionals in 2005 when the General Assembly weighed whether to shutter its horse slaughter facility in DeKalb. Yet Cavel ultimately lost the battle when lawmakers — bolstered by appearances in Springfield of anti-slaughter activist Bo Derek — voted last spring to shut it down. Cavel is fighting the state law in federal court.

"Government continues to grow," says David Vite, executive director of the Illinois Retail Merchants Association. "Just look at the number of bills that were introduced in the last two, three or four years. It's grown exponentially from when there were a third more members

in the Illinois House [before a state constitutional amendment trimming the size of that chamber]. We had fewer bills introduced then than we do today."

Rep. Lou Lang, a Skokie Democrat, agrees. He is one of the governor's harshest critics, yet he cautions against interpreting the lobbying trend as an indication the governor has overpoliticized matters in Springfield.

"There are many business entities out there in the world and not-for-profits who have just started to figure out over the last several years, 'If we want to get something done in Springfield, we have to engage somebody to get it done for us,'" he says. He says special interest groups, down to tiny nonprofits, are growing more sophisticated.

"Some would probably like to conclude that when the Blagojevich people came in, they made a whole bunch of people lobbyists so they could trade off of their relationships with the governor," he says. "That may or may not be true. It is true that we had gone through 30 years of Republican governors, and Blagojevich was the first Democratic governor. So I think there might have been a rush by some people to hire

Democratic lobbyists — people that have relationships with Democrats."

It is true of certain businesses that hired professionals after lobbying for themselves. Successful politics rests on relationships. A lobbyist's value depends as much, if not more, on the lobbyist's ability to open doors as on his or her knowledge of issues or government process.

Consulting firm Accenture is a classic example. It lobbied on its own behalf through 2003, then retained the former lobbying firm of David Wilhelm, a Blagojevich friend, in 2004. Accenture had another link to Blagojevich through Michael Rumman, who, after working for Accenture, served as his director of the Illinois Department of Central Management Services.

State payments to Accenture increased from \$2.9 million in 2004 to \$19.8 million in 2005. The level of state payments to that company decreased in 2006 to \$9 million, though they remained higher than in 2004.

Mesirow Financial did its own lobbying through 2003, then hired an outside firm. In 2004, state payments to Mesirow grew to \$1.39 million, from \$661,707 in

The ranks of lobbyists aren't likely to thin as government continues to grow both in heft and complexity. They'll surely benefit from ongoing political complications, too.

2003. The state paid the firm \$1.4 million in 2005 and \$1.12 million in 2006. One of its lobbyists, William Filan, is a cousin of Blagojevich's former budget director.

But retaining a lobbyist doesn't always result in huge increases in state business. Another consulting firm, KPMG, hired a contract lobbying firm in 2004, though its share of state funds did not escalate dramatically. The state paid KPMG \$1.8 million in 2004, \$1.7 million in 2005, \$2 million in 2006 and at least \$1.6 million in fiscal 2007.

Bear Stearns & Co., an investment banking firm, represented itself through 2002. But in 2003 and 2004, when it won the job of helping the state underwrite a \$10 billion bond issue to bolster public pension systems, it retained Bob Kjellander, who also is the state's GOP national committeeman, to help broker the deal.

The deal won Kjellander an \$809,000 fee — as well as notoriety in Illinois political circles, particularly among fellow Republicans who argued that he shouldn't benefit financially from lobbying the Democratic governor's administration.

Several, from dairy mogul and perennial candidate Jim Oberweis to House Minority Leader Tom Cross of Oswego, called on Kjellander to resign from his committeeman post, saying the controversy impeded the party's effort to rebuild.

Kjellander also earned more than \$3 million for helping Carlyle Group win the job of investing funds from the Illinois Teachers' Retirement System. In October 2006, Kjellander was identified as "Individual K" in the plea agreement of Stuart Levine, who pleaded guilty to participating in a scheme to get kickbacks from firms doing business with two state boards. Kjellander was not charged with a crime.

"There's really nothing there," Kjellander said in the spring. "It's two sentences in a 58-page plea agreement or whatever that is. I don't even know what that is; I'm not a lawyer. But all it says is that I was doing my job as a lobbyist for the Carlyle Group, period. I didn't share any fees with anybody. There is nothing, nothing wrong there whatsoever. Because it's me, it's a headline."

Dave Weisbaum, chief deputy director of the secretary of state's index department, says a number of factors may drive the lobbying registration trend and that it should not be tagged strictly as "increased registrations."

"The dramatic increase in that number

could be due to the type of legislative challenges that were apparent or occurring in the General Assembly," he says. "There could have been a lot of temporary contractual relationships because of a major issue. There could have been errors made when registering where a firm could have listed itself as a client since the firms had been used to a moniker in previous registration years of 'lobbying on their own behalf.' We would have to open and review every file to determine how these factors and possibly others may contribute to the jump of 2006."

The ranks of lobbyists aren't likely to thin as government continues to grow both in heft and complexity. They'll surely benefit from ongoing political complications, too. Some controversial policy matters such as gambling and electric utility deregulation may never be fully resolved.

The spotlight on ethics at the Capitol won't soon be dimming, and that means continued pressure on lobbyists and their clients to fully disclose their presence and relationships. The federal probe that led to former GOP Gov. George Ryan's conviction on corruption charges rolled into the federal probe of Blagojevich's fundraising, hiring and contracting practices.

"Since the end of the Ryan Administration and the beginning of the Blagojevich Administration, there has been a sense under the dome that there is greater scrutiny. There are investigations going on," says Cindi Canary, director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform. "I think some of that fever has spread out into the lobbying community. There is a lot more concern about crossing the t's and dotting the i's, and that means registering when you're supposed to." □

Aaron Chambers is Statehouse bureau chief for the Rockford Register Star.

On their own

Meanwhile, the number of entities that registered to lobby on their own behalf declined. These individuals, businesses and organizations lobby without the assistance of contract lobbyists. Also, they do not lobby on any other organization's behalf.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>ENTITIES</u>
2000564
20015854%
2002535-9%
20035554%
2004425-23%
2005397-7%
2006318-20%
2007313-2%

SOURCE: Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White's office

New citizens

Talk of immigration reform
is pushing a surge in applications

by Maura Kelly Lannan

Carlos Enriquez came to the United States from Colombia about 10 years ago as a tourist, intending to visit Walt Disney World and some friends in Florida. But he liked the United States so much he never left, choosing instead to abandon all his possessions and start

over with a new job. Three years ago, Enriquez moved from Florida to Chicago. He bought a condominium, got married and became a father.

During all of this, the 34-year-old insurance agent was a legal permanent resident and did not consider becoming a

U.S. citizen. He thought the required test might be too difficult and the application process would be too much work — until he heard talk about a new immigration law.

"I wanted to feel more secure," Enriquez says, adding that he was scared when he heard politicians discuss

Photograph courtesy of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights



Volunteers assist immigrants interested in applying for citizenship at a workshop at West Side Technical Institute in Chicago.



Volunteers screen citizen applications at a workshop. In Illinois, 4,500 more applications were filed this July than last July.

deportation for illegal immigrants.

"My life is already here, so if you send me to Colombia, I won't know what to do anymore. I don't have friends [there] anymore," Enriquez says. "It was really scary to think about that."

Enriquez met someone who helps immigrants complete citizenship applications, and she convinced him the process wouldn't be difficult. He attended a citizenship workshop where he received help in completing the required paperwork and became a citizen on July 11, 2006. Now he helps others apply through such workshops across Illinois.

Enriquez is one of thousands of legal immigrants who have applied to become U.S. citizens since the issue of immigration reform heated up at the national level. Congress failed to approve an immigration reform measure in late June that focused mostly on illegal immigrants, but that prompted other legal immigrants to seek naturalization.

In Illinois, applications this July outpaced those filed last July by nearly 4,500. Many individuals likely were hoping to beat a July 30 deadline, after

which application fees jumped about 69 percent. Still more applied because they feared changes in the test that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services plans to make in the spring of 2008. And many applied so they'll be eligible to vote in the 2008 national election, immigration advocates say.

"I think immigrants and immigrant communities are starting to realize that, if they're going to have a say in American government, and particularly the immigration debate, they're going to have to become citizens and register and vote," says Fred Tsao, policy director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, a Chicago-based immigrants' rights advocacy organization.

The numbers show an upward trend. From October 2006 through June 2007, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services received 770,944 applications from people nationwide seeking to become citizens, says Marilu Cabrera, spokeswoman for the agency's north central region, which is based in Chicago. For the 2006 fiscal year, which ran from October 2005 through September 2006, the agency received 730,642 naturalization

applications. In the 2005 fiscal year, the agency received 602,972 applications for citizenship.

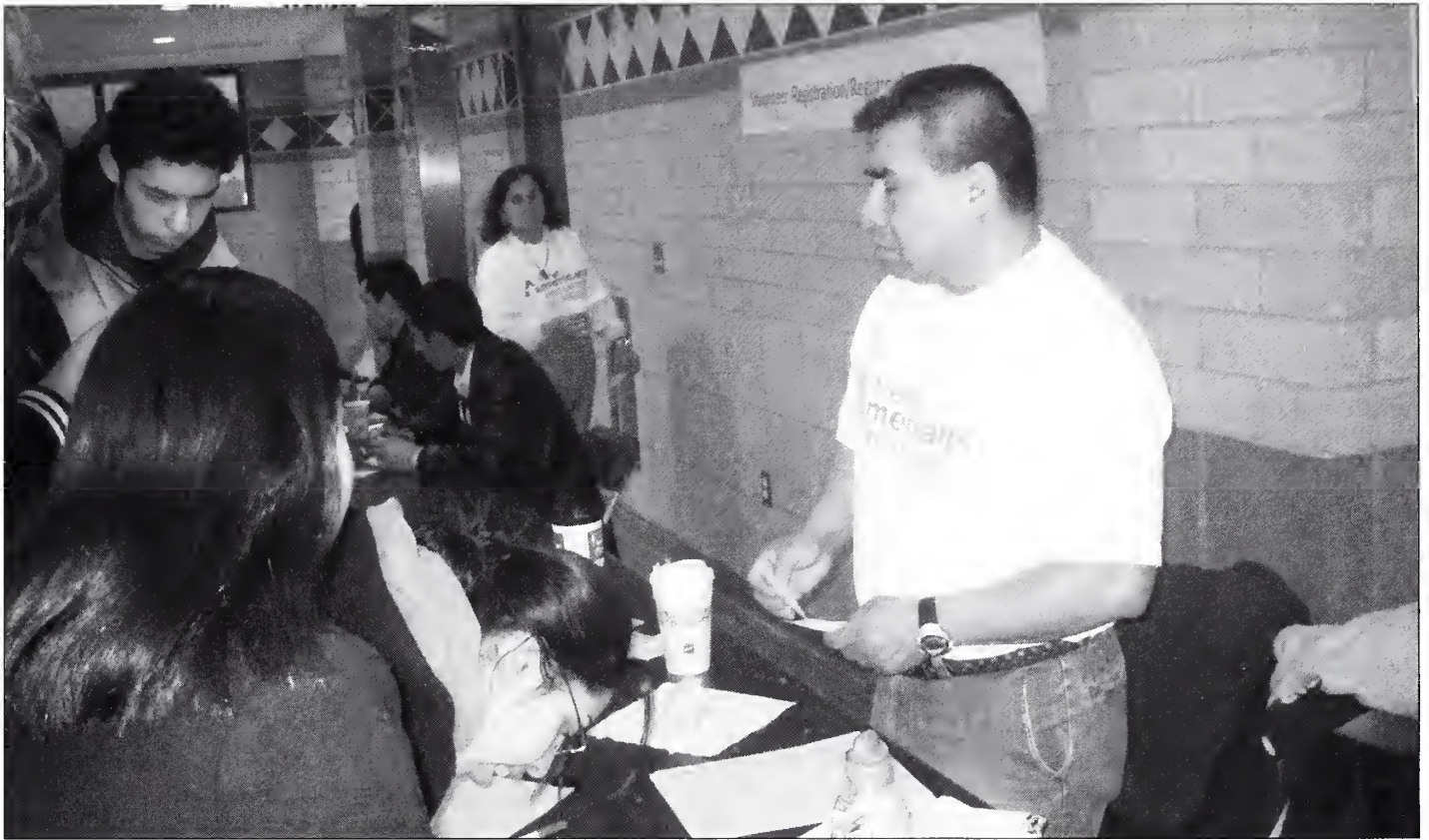
The numbers are increasing in Illinois also. In July 2007, Cabrera says, 7,432 Illinois residents applied for citizenship, compared to 2,945 in July 2006.

"We've never seen this number," Cabrera said of the July 2007 figure. "That's very high."

Cabrera predicts the agency will receive more applications nationwide for citizenship by the end of this fiscal year than it did during the last fiscal year. One reason, she says, is the new test. However, Cabrera denies the agency is trying to make the test harder, as some immigrants fear.

"We don't want to fail people on purpose," she says. "We want to make the test more meaningful for those who want to become citizens."

For example, she says the new test might ask people what their rights are as a U.S. citizen, instead of the current test that relies more on memorization skills. The new test was offered as a pilot program in 10 cities across the United States last winter, and 92.9 percent passed



Through such programs as the New Americans Initiative, immigrants are given assistance in applying for residency.

the civics portion, while 98.9 percent passed the writing part, Cabrera says.

Applicants are asked 10 questions that test their knowledge of U.S. government and English, Cabrera says. They are given 100 questions to study before the test, and they are asked to answer 10 of those during the test. They must answer six questions correctly to pass. They also are asked to write one sentence in English. They have three chances to write the sentence correctly.

To become a U.S. citizen, an applicant must pass the English and civics test, have no criminal background and have lived in the United States for five years as a legal permanent resident or three years if he or she acquired residency through a spouse who is a U.S. citizen.

Concern about increased fees also pushed the rise in applications. Many immigrant advocacy groups have complained about the higher citizenship application fee, which jumped from \$400 to \$675. "A 70 percent increase is pretty precipitous," Tsao says, adding that the new \$675 fee can be what some people earn working 40 hours a week for four weeks.

But Cabrera notes that the biggest share of the agency's funding comes from fees. The agency receives only about 1 percent of its nearly \$2 billion budget in funding from Congress.

"We haven't done this process in a bubble," Cabrera says, adding that the agency sought input from community groups. "But we explained the fact that, in order to provide services, we need to charge what it costs us to process applications.

"We are a fee-based agency and we need to recover the cost of doing business," Cabrera says, adding that the agency also hopes to reduce the processing time for applications. Applicants can seek waivers if they cannot afford the fees.

In Illinois, immigration advocates say more individuals are seeking help with naturalization applications. Through the New Americans Initiative, the state gives grants to the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. That group distributes the money to community organizations so they can offer free services to immigrants seeking help with the naturalization process.

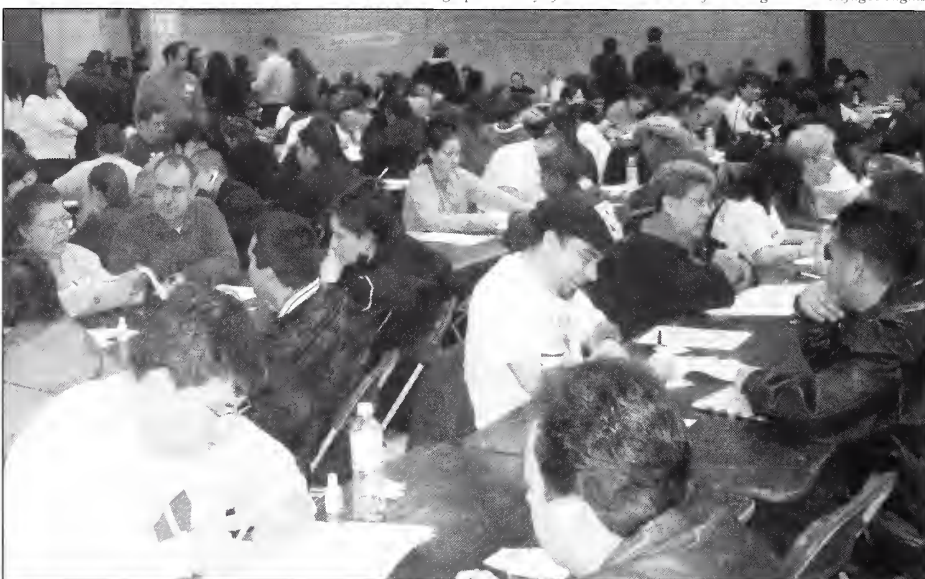
The New Americans Initiative, which took effect in 2004, offers workshops at various community organizations, schools, churches or parks where immigrants can get help filling out the required paperwork to apply for U.S. citizenship. Immigrants can have their pictures taken for their applications, consult with lawyers and receive referrals to English and citizenship classes.

More than 26,000 legal permanent residents have received help with their citizenship applications since the first workshop was held in February 2005, says Karla Avila, director of the New Americans Initiative.

At the Instituto del Progreso Latino in Chicago, one of the grantees for the New Americans Initiative, workers were helping two people apply for citizenship every hour during the weeks leading up to the July 30 fee increase. They normally help one person per hour, says Sonia Gaete, the program's citizenship director.

Despite higher fees, Avila hopes legal immigrants continue to apply for citizenship as the 2008 national election draws closer. "That will be the only way we

Some barriers immigrants cite for not applying for citizenship, advocates say, include a fear that their English-speaking abilities aren't good enough and that the administrative process for applying is too complex.



The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights conducts citizenship workshops.

can get immigration reform and elect politicians that are aware of the needs of the immigrant community.”

Other citizenship campaigns across the country have prompted people to apply for naturalization, advocates say. In California, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund is part of a multimedia campaign to encourage legal residents to apply for citizenship. The group's representatives say they have received more than 35,000 calls to their citizenship hotline since the campaign started in February.

Some barriers immigrants cite for not applying for citizenship, advocates say, include a fear that their English-speaking abilities aren't good enough and that the administrative process for applying is too complex. But rallies and marches calling attention to immigration reform during the past two years have helped motivate some to apply for citizenship to get the economic and personal security that citizenship would provide, says Javier Angulo, the group's director of civic education.

“I think there's really a sense that Congress has failed the [immigrant] community and people want to do something,” Angulo says. “Even legal permanent residency is not secure enough. To be fully secure, you must become a U.S. citizen.”

U.S. citizens also have greater flexibility in petitioning for family members to come to the United States from other countries and have more employment opportunities, Angulo says.

Immigration reform is still on the national political agenda. “The issue is not going away. Just because the Senate failed to do anything doesn't mean 12 million undocumented citizens will disappear overnight,” Tsao says. “We need to take a deep breath and really think through what our policies should be.”

The immigration reform proposal that failed in the Senate in late June would have strengthened border security, allowed employers to hire temporary workers and provided a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants.

Meanwhile, U.S. Sen. Barack Obama and U.S. Rep. Luis Guterrez, both Chicago Democrats, co-sponsored a measure that would drop citizenship application fees to the levels they stood at before the recent increase. The proposal, which is pending in committee, also would ensure that some costs not associated with the application process be funded through Congress and not through increased filing fees.

Another proposal is designed to make attaining citizenship easier. U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin, an Illinois Democrat, co-sponsored a measure that would offer

a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants who are high school graduates if they finish at least two years of college or military service. Christina Angarola, spokeswoman for Durbin, says the proposal, known as the DREAM Act, was part of the failed immigration reform measure. She said that Durbin plans to reintroduce it this fall.

Reaching the goal of citizenship is equivalent to gaining new power, some say. Enriquez, the Chicago insurance agent who became a citizen last year, says, “I want to make sure that I can be a part of the change. You make the difference when you vote. If you don't vote, nobody knows that you are there.”

He thinks any reform to immigration laws should help those who want to become U.S. citizens. “I'm a strong believer that we should give immigrants who live here and are working hard the opportunity to become part of the country and part of the whole society,” Enriquez says.

He says he feels proud to be a U.S. citizen and enjoys helping others apply for naturalization.

“Now I feel at home.” □

Maura Kelly Lannan is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance reporter who formerly covered Illinois government and politics for The Associated Press in Chicago.

Clinic in a school

Advocates argue school-based centers can protect students' health, improve attendance and boost academic performance. But they'll need state and federal financial support

by Bethany Jaeger

The job of a school nurse is changing. More students suffer from complicated medical problems related to asthma, diabetes and obesity. And more health symptoms are showing up that may be rooted in emotional stressors, including a troubled home life, a drug problem or a behavior disorder. So, with an eye to preventive care, school administrators are looking for new ways to serve adolescents who are most vulnerable to health risks.

Yet they're also under pressure to cut costs. Many districts have cut school nurses' hours, eliminated nurses altogether or replaced them with registered nurses who have more general training.

In more districts around Illinois and the nation, though, administrators have increasingly turned to a different approach. Under a model first tried in the mid-1980s, local school boards invite operating health clinics into schools to complement the care provided by their school nurses.

Doctors who often specialize in pediatrics or family practice oversee these school-based health centers

that are staffed with nurses, physician assistants, counselors, and sometimes dentists and psychologists. They can become resources for faculty, staff, students and their families. Students simply walk down the hall to be treated for anything from bellyaches to suicidal thoughts. They can make appointments for sports physicals, immunizations, nutrition counseling, dental checkups or, in some cases, prenatal care, provided they have parental permission.

Chicago Public Schools Chief Arne Duncan says the 23 existing school-based health centers in his district

provide a model for addressing students' social and emotional needs, as well as some of the family members' needs.

"We talk about schools truly becoming community centers. That's actually part of the vision," Duncan says. "You want this wide variety of high-quality programming beyond the normal school day. And if we could expand the number of school-based health centers, we would do it tomorrow."

Duncan says the centers focus on a holistic and preventive approach that improves student attendance, which increases federal funding. They also

heighten the chances of better academic performance, another statistic rewarded by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Financially, however, Duncan says the district can't expand school-based health centers without state help. "Like everything else we're trying to do right now, due to the lack of state support, extending that now is unrealistic. With additional state support, that goes right back onto the table."

More schools want to connect preventive

Photograph courtesy of the American Academy of Pediatrics News



Dr. Cynthia Mears examines Sandra Agudo at the Arai School-Based Health Center, now at Uplift Community School in Chicago.



State Sen. Michael Noland, an Elgin Democrat, meets with students from Craue High School in Chicago. They visited the Capitol in April to advocate for more state funding.

health care with school achievement. Both are linked to capturing federal dollars, but neither the states nor the feds have been a source of sustainable funding for school-based health centers. So clinics often turn to private companies, nonprofit foundations and in-kind donations to keep the doors open. As more clinics try to start, however, momentum is building for local, state and federal governments to foot more of the bill.

About 50 communities within Illinois already have school-based health centers. They're located around Chicago and scattered throughout rural and urban areas downstate where clusters of children enrolled in Medicaid go to school.

About 50 other communities have expressed interest in starting new clinics, according to Victoria Jackson, school health program coordinator for the Illinois Department of Human Services. The interest "never stops growing."

Principals or local health care providers often spark the interest and bring it up to the school board. If the board decides to pursue a clinic, then a local advisory committee usually searches for startup money, building accommodations and community acceptance. The board also decides the extent of services to be offered, allowing the community to deem it appropriate or not for students

to have access to birth control or to be referred to another community clinic that can provide it.

Along with local control, however, comes the responsibility to find sustainable funding for the clinics.

"It's almost, literally, like bake sales," says Dr. Elizabeth Feldman, a family physician and medical director of the Advocate Illinois Masonic Medical Centers, which operates school-based health clinics in Chicago. "We're trying everything we can do."

She's been involved in school health centers in two Chicago public schools on the North Side since they opened their doors in the mid-1990s. Last year, according to the annual school report cards, more than half of the students at Amundsen High School were Hispanic and about 90 percent were considered low-income. The second clinic is in Lake View High School, which was then more than half Hispanic and nearly 82 percent low-income.

Feldman says though the students and their families have access to medical services in their communities, the school health centers can better reach students in a way that's tailored for them. "Even in an urban setting where there's plenty of [emergency rooms] within a 5-mile radius, kids often don't access care unless it's proven to be adolescent-friendly, confiden-

tial, respectful, nonjudgmental."

The need to connect those students to health services heightens because Hispanics are the most likely population to be uninsured, according to a 2006 report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Health Statistics. In 2004, 41 percent of people born in Mexico and living in the United States lacked health insurance for at least part of the year before the interview.

At the same time, the number of 12- to 19-year-olds who were overweight gradually increased from 10 percent in 1994 to more than 17 percent by 2004, the report says. The numbers are even higher for children younger than 11.

It's a double whammy if the adolescents are Latino and from low-income families. Both groups are more likely to be overweight than children who are white or black and from middle-income families.

At the southern tip of the state, the number of low-income students in Murphysboro led locals to want a school-based health center. They've worked for a year and a half to secure funding and support services, according to Connie Favreau, assistant director and operating officer at Shawnee Health Service. The provider already operates one in Carbondale Community High



State Rep. John Bradley, a Marion Democrat, visits Marion Unit 2 Wellness Center at Marion High School and talks with Marsha Meiners, a physician assistant.

School and one in Marion Community Unit School District 2.

Murphysboro will start a clinic if it can find a way to pay \$140,000 for remodeling and come up with operating costs, Favreau says. "That's not small change to school districts that are typically struggling nowadays, and we certainly don't have the funds."

When startup money is secured, she says it'll take up to three years to earn enough income from the billing of Medicaid or of private insurance companies so the clinic can sustain services.

The school nurses in Murphysboro are especially interested in bringing a health center to the school, she says. They're often the first ones to see a child when the child complains about not feeling well, she says, but they can't always immediately connect the student to a doctor. It also takes time to reach parents so they can get off work and take a child to the doctor. Favreau says a school-based health center could help provide more prompt care and help parents avoid conflicts with work.

By establishing a health clinic within the school, medical providers also hope to catch some of the physical and behavioral problems before they start or alleviate them if they've already developed.

"Adolescents generally aren't good health care consumers," says John

Schlitt, executive director of the National Assembly for School-Based Health Care based in Washington, D.C. "They just don't go for preventive health care visits, and regardless of socioeconomic status, that's fairly well established."

He says the school-based health centers complement different types of health insurance, whether public or private. "Insurance simply means you've removed some of the financial access barriers. It doesn't necessarily mean you've broken down the geographic barriers, or the cultural barriers, or the physical access barriers, or the barrier of just no motivation to seek care," Schlitt says. "There's a lot of barriers that teenagers particularly have that have nothing to do with their lack of insurance."

He says because the leading cause of mortality and morbidity in adolescents is behavioral health issues — not physical problems — the clinics are becoming a new way to treat adolescent mental health. Because the medical providers are right in the school, they can recognize students who visit the clinic for vague symptoms on a regular basis, Favreau says.

"The bellyaches that you see children coming in with, vague complaints, headaches, sometimes really aren't a physical problem but are more of a mental health issue," she says. "It could be family

relationships. It could be relationships with other friends. That does affect how they perform academically."

To encourage holistic health, the clinics work with the physical education classes, develop on-site weight loss programs, identify kids going through the grieving process and start support groups within the school.

"The more services that you provide on-site, the more comfortable it is for the children to participate," Favreau says. "They don't feel quite so threatened in the participation process."

Feeling comfortable is critical for adolescents to reach out for help, particularly if their parents aren't around. At the Lake View and Amundsen clinics in Chicago, about 20 percent to 30 percent of students' monthly visits are for mental health diagnoses, according to Feldman. She says parents are sometimes the catalyst for misbehavior. "Most of the time, what we're helping these kids deal with are the result of things that are beyond their control and are behaviors that adults around them are engaging in," Feldman says. "We have a number of kids who really are parenting themselves. One parent in jail, another who has passed away, so they're officially being raised by a grandparent who's disabled or who has a mental illness."

While parental involvement remains a

standard priority among school health clinics, state law protects some aspects of adolescents' privacy. Parents of 12- to 19-year-olds can't access the students' medical records for reproductive health, substance abuse or mental health unless the student allows it.

But parents do have a say in the extent of services their students can access. Parents in Carbondale, Cahokia and Marion, for instance, didn't want the clinics within their high schools to dispense contraceptives, says Williamenia Allen, a nurse and program manager for school health centers in Cahokia High School and East St. Louis High School. "We don't do any condoms, and we don't do any birth control methods from inside."

The registered nurses can write prescriptions for birth control devices.

But Allen says dealing with birth control issues is a minor part of the clinics' challenges. The biggest part is finding sustainable funding for all types of services, some of which can't be billed to any type of insurance or which have low federal reimbursement rates.

State funding is available, but limited. Illinois gradually increased funding for school-based clinics from about \$3.8 million in fiscal year 2003 to \$4.1 million in fiscal year '07. That amount is divided among some 40 health centers.

Compared to other states, Illinois funds more clinics than some but far fewer than others, says Jackson of the Illinois Department of Human Services. "Some states still fund almost three times as many health centers as we do."

The clinics that do get state funding typically only get between 26 percent and 44 percent of their operating costs, according to a cost-benefit analysis by the Illinois Coalition for School Health Centers, a project of the Chicago-based Illinois Maternal & Child Health Coalition. The clinics' operating budgets can range from \$170,000 to \$460,000.

Most school-based health clinics rely on a mix of local, state and federal



Dr. Terri Morris examines junior Renee Dickerson in the HEART Clinic at Young Women's Leadership High School in Chicago.

grants, as well as private and in-kind donations from foundations, medical providers and local businesses. But when the grant money runs out, the search for a sustainable mix of funding ensues.

Four of five school-based health centers sponsored by Cook County closed in April because of across-the-board budget cuts. The surviving center, J. Sterling Morton East High School in Cicero, is in a predominantly poor area. The school's 2006 report card shows that nearly 95 percent of the 3,362 students were Hispanic. About 65 percent of them were considered low-income.

State Sen. Martin Sandoval, a Chicago Democrat who helped fight for the Cicero health clinic, says administrators realized that out of all school-based health centers in the county, Morton East needed to be saved from the budget ax because of its high dropout rates and high pregnancy rates.

"Statistics that we are not proud of is what led to the saving of the health clinic," he says.

Government reimbursements also had something to do with it. Don Rashid, director of public affairs for the John H.

Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County, one of the clinic sponsors, says, "The Cicero center has remained open largely in part to 71 percent of its clients being Medicaid patients. That represents a lot of money for the [Cook County Bureau of Health Services]."

Pressure is on for the feds to commit more money for the existing 1,700 school-based health centers around the nation. Numerous advocates gathered in Washington, D.C., this summer. They're supporting a measure that would create the Health Schools Act of 2007, which is designed to ensure government reimbursements reach student health centers that serve children covered by Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program. It also would set minimum services that the schools would have to offer for such primary care as mental health, dental health and health education.

A second effort seeks to authorize federal grants for school-based health centers.

At the state level, advocates want more funding to the tune of \$30 million over five years to start 20 new centers. The legislation, which was sent to Gov. Rod Blagojevich in June, states that the clinics save the state about \$2.5 million a year by reducing emergency room visits, \$2.7 million a year by providing immunizations and up to \$342,000 a year by reducing asthma-related hospitalizations.

With a delayed state budget and ongoing negotiations stretching into August, school-based health centers didn't know whether they would receive more state money in the next couple of years.

"We have excellent support for [the measure], but it's just a question of how far the state budget will go," Favreau says. "So I guess our legislators will have to prioritize. We all hope that we're the priority, but in reality, somebody's not going to be a priority. We don't know where we'll end up." □

Confined on the outside

Ex-offenders have struggled for decades to find jobs, but advocates say limited employment is rooted in attitudes, government funding priorities and federal law

by Deanese Williams-Harris

Brandy Brown works with one employer at a time while trying to change beliefs about hiring workers with criminal records. As outreach supervisor for the CeaseFire program in Decatur, she also spends countless hours trying to convince ex-convicts to turn away from crime.

"You just can't plant a seed," she says.

"You have to nourish it."

CeaseFire, an initiative of the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention, employs ex-offenders as mediators in gang violence.

After years of living on the wrong side of the law, Brown says God changed her mind and her life. Her gratitude compels her to help others, and she says there's

no way she would ever return to her old ways. Instead, she has walked the streets for the past seven years trying to help ex-offenders find jobs and stay out of prison.

"So many of us wonder why people are snatching purses, robbing and committing burglary. They can't get jobs," she says.

"It's not right, but what else can they do?"

Photograph courtesy of the Safer Foundation



This supervisor at a waste management company has a criminal record.



The Safer Foundation helps link employers and potential workers who have served time.

“Giving ex-offenders a job is society’s insurance that they won’t be committing crimes,” she says.

But the state’s economy can’t keep up with the number of prisoners who are released each year, says B. Diane Williams, president of the Safer Foundation, a Chicago-based organization. That group has a 35-year history of helping ex-offenders re-enter their communities through jobs, housing and substance abuse counseling. But Williams warns that programs designed to help ex-offenders find jobs will founder in the next couple of years if more isn’t done at the state and federal levels.

Illinois isn’t alone in this. The latest data from 2002 show that more than 50 percent of those serving time return to prison. That doesn’t bode well for the future. The American Bar Association reports that more than 2 million juveniles and adults are imprisoned. In addition, about 5 million individuals are on parole, on probation or under court supervision. And every year, more than 650,000 prisoners try to re-enter their communities.

“We’re the most imprisoned nation on the face of the earth,” says U.S. Rep.

Danny Davis, a Chicago Democrat. “Nobody in the world has more imprisoned people. In the Land of Lincoln, 40,000 people come home from prison every year.”

The scarcity of jobs available to ex-offenders contributes to high recidivism rates. More people coming out of jail means more competition for fewer jobs. And those jobs that are available tend to be low-paying positions that offer no health insurance.

In addition, there’s limited support from social programs to help ex-convicts stay drug-free and sheltered.

Criminal records can follow ex-offenders for a lifetime, haunting them when they are trying to find jobs. But Davis says the problem is much bigger than securing employment. He says ex-offenders face a combination of obstacles when they get out of jail, including social stigma and adverse laws.

“When people get out of prison, they don’t have an identification card, nowhere to live, no job, laws that keep you from public housing,” Davis says. “You can’t cut hair, you can’t be a beautician, you can’t be a lawyer, can’t be a doctor, you can’t work in a hospital, you can’t work in a nursing home, you

can’t get a Pell grant. What can you do? You can stand on a corner and yell, ‘I got blow, I got crack, I got pills, whatever you want, I got.’ We have to try to change people’s minds.”

But changing minds is difficult when they’re filled with stereotypes about people who have served time.

The majority of individuals who have criminal backgrounds tend to find entry-level employment in the food service, building maintenance, construction, customer service and warehousing industries. Those jobs often pay minimum wages and have limited fringe benefits.

The federal government does offer incentives to companies that hire workers who have criminal records. Businesses can receive a \$600 maximum tax credit for each qualified ex-offender they hire. Still, there aren’t enough jobs to go around.

One proposed solution would prevent employers from discriminating against people who have criminal records, but few states have actually enacted it. Only 14 bar employment discrimination based on convictions, reports the Legal Action Center, a New York-based organization. Only five states prohibit private employment discrimination.

However, state Rep. Annazette



An orientation session is conducted at the Safer Foundation.

Collins, a Chicago Democrat, says she's working on legislation that would prohibit employers from asking about criminal history on job applications.

Brown of the CeaseFire program says she's all for legislation to "eliminate the box."

"If the box wasn't there, you wouldn't be able to tell who was an ex-offender," she says.

State Rep. Constance Howard, also a Chicago Democrat, introduced legislation this spring that would prohibit blanket discrimination of people with prior convictions. The measure failed. However, the issue is under study by the Task Force on Employment of Persons with Past Criminal Convictions, which was formed in 2006. The group is scheduled to release its findings to the governor in December of 2008.

Still, even if employers are willing to consider ex-offenders as applicants, ex-offenders are likely to lack the working skills needed to land the job. Jim Zangs, director of the Michael Barlow Center of St. Leonard's Ministries in Chicago, says, "Some may have difficulty keeping a job because a workplace is foreign to them. Some are thrown into a work environment at 35, 40 years old."

St. Leonard's Ministries is one of the many organizations in the state that helps ex-offenders learn entry-level skills to qualify for jobs. It also helps them learn to read in an adult high school, as long as they completed two or more years of school before dropping out. They also have a chance to participate in a 50-hour training program.

The center has had some success. Its semi-annual update shows that more than 70 percent of the individuals in the building maintenance program work 180 consecutive days, and more than 50 percent in the food service program work more than six months.

Zangs says it can still be difficult for some to find employers who are willing to overlook a criminal record and give ex-offenders a shot at making a living wage. "There are no employers with signs that say, 'We hire ex-offenders,'" he says.

Without a stable job, former inmates might turn to the problem that got them into prison in the first place: a drug or alcohol addiction.

While there's "no magic pill solution" to help people stay out of prison, Williams says, "there isn't a formula for success that doesn't include creating

jobs, addressing drug abuse and changing laws that prevent ex-offenders from finding employment."

There are few facilities around the nation where ex-offenders can receive treatment on demand, but lack of funding to provide substance abuse treatment is a main reason they return to prison, according to U.S. Rep. Davis.

"About 800,000 people in Cook County alone say they use drugs," he says. "Seventy-five percent of the people police arrest test positive for drugs every year. We would actually do better putting money into prevention than intervention."

Illinois has started to focus on treating substance abuse while inmates are serving time. The Sheridan Correctional Center has the largest state drug and crime reduction program in the nation. While getting treatment, inmates can learn a trade. The facility has been in operation for more than two years, and Williams says the model is working.

The Illinois Department of Corrections reports a 50 percent lower re-incarceration rate for people who have entered the Sheridan program. The model is being used in the development of another facility dedicated to addressing substance abuse and re-entry at Southwestern Illinois



This resource specialist at the Safer Foundation has a criminal record.

Correctional Center, which will be supported by almost \$2 million in state funding. The center will include a 200-bed methamphetamine-abuse unit and is scheduled to open this year.

Williams adds that some of the policies that aren't working are embedded in federal law. For instance, once people are convicted of a felony charge, federal requirements prohibit them from living in subsidized housing. Those with a history of drug offenses can't receive federal grants to attend college. Also, certain jobs are off limits to people with criminal records because they can't obtain state professional licensing.

"The laws on the books do not take into regard the type of crime committed, how old the person was when the crime was committed and the time that has lapsed since the last offense," Williams says.

To help employers feel more comfortable in hiring ex-offenders, the Safer Foundation promotes expansion of the criteria that the Prisoner Review Board considers when ruling whether ex-offenders deserve a certificate of good conduct. The certificates make it easier to get licensing in professions such as cosmetology or roofing that

otherwise would be off limits. For instance, a judge would consider when the crime was committed, how old the person was and whether the ex-offender is on a path of rehabilitation. To qualify, people would be limited to two felony convictions, and neither could be for violent crimes, sexual offenses or the most serious felonies.

State Rep. Howard, whom Davis calls the "Maven of Re-entry," also sponsored legislation that would allow ex-offenders to petition the courts for the certificates of good conduct.

Other attempts to end the cycle of recidivism take a holistic approach.

On the federal level, Davis, along with Illinois Sens. Richard Durbin and Barack Obama, sponsored the Second Chance Act. It would designate federal dollars for programs designed to provide job training and substance abuse counseling. Housing also would be set aside for ex-offenders. About 100,000 units of federally supported housing would be created for ex-prisoners throughout the country.

It's an effort to address the social problems that landed people in jail in the first place. It's also an effort to reverse the 1980s and '90s trend of enacting "tough-on-crime" laws that contributed

to the overcrowding of prisons, now playing out in the number of individuals released each year.

Davis says the reaction to the Second Chance Act in Washington, D.C., is the best he's seen in years. The measure won the approval of the House and Senate Judiciary committees and moves to the floor for debate in both chambers. Davis says he's confident the measure will win approval before the end of the year, as long as it doesn't get hung up with such other pressing issues as the national budget and the war.

In the meantime, some ex-offenders will continue to be prisoners on the outside. Brown says to change that, employers must be willing to give people who made mistakes as young adults another shot. She suggests employers commit to hiring otherwise qualified individuals who have criminal records.

"Put them on probation and see how it works," Brown says. "They want to work because there's no possible way you can make it and stay out of prison without a job." □

Miracle or threat

For good or ill, tax increment financing is slowly redesigning Illinois' complicated but stable system of local government finance

Analysis by James Krohe Jr.

Most people who read past the sports and the comics know that TIF — tax increment financing — is controversial. Fewer know why this model form of local government initiative is controversial, or care to. That's because TIF as a topic is also complicated and dull, which is much worse.

If you listen to its many advocates, TIF is the nearest thing yet devised to a miracle cure for the poor fiscal health of many Illinois cities. The pro-TIF Illinois Tax Increment Association sounds a bit like a patent medicine peddler when it explains how “financially strapped local governments can make the improvements they need, like new roads or new sewers, and provide incentives to attract businesses or help existing businesses expand, without tapping into general funds or raising taxes.” It probably safely removes warts, too.

Academic economists, do-gooder groups and local school districts beg to differ. To them, TIF, as too-often-practiced in Illinois, is a threat to the Commonwealth. It is overpromised and overused and applied where it is needed least. It encourages sprawl and encourages massive transfers of wealth from local taxpayers to national and multinational corporations. TIF-financed spending is poorly regulated, and accountability provisions are weak.

These are all good reasons to question TIF practices, if not necessarily to rewrite the TIF act. TIF also is undermining Illinois' system of local government

finance. In a report published last spring, titled *A Tale of Two Cities: Reinventing Tax Increment Financing*, Cook County Commissioner Mike Quigley reminded anyone paying attention that a city can, using TIF, offload onto overlapping taxing entities some of the costs of economic development and the political costs of the resulting higher property taxes.

Photograph courtesy of the town of Normal



Since the town of Normal launched an Uptown redevelopment program through a TIF four years ago, such new businesses as Emack & Bolio's have opened.

That's nice for city hall, less nice for those overlapping taxing entities. In effect, those nonmunicipal entities fund the city's economic development program with their own forgone revenues, which will eventually have to be made up either by levying higher taxes on properties outside the TIF or by reducing services. The former amounts to what Quigley, for one, calls a secret tax hike. In tax year 2005, for instance, TIF districts in Cook County diverted \$53 million from the county government and \$6 million from the forest preserve district, effectively forcing county and district tax rates to be 7 percent higher than they would have been without the TIF diversions.

The weight of such offloading falls especially hard on school districts, which make the biggest tax demands on local property and cannot tax the new value in TIF-ed areas for a generation or more until the TIF district expires. A number of problems flow from making local governments wait for their inheritance, so to speak. For example, good local schools matter more than infrastructure or even local taxes in attracting the best kinds of new industrial development; by shorting them, Illinois' best economic development tool can undercut the larger aims of economic development policy.

TIF abuse also can subvert long-established local controls in the allocation of public money. In Oak Park recently, village officials agreed to help the local elementary school district out of its



A new Marriott Hotel and Conference Center is planned for the upgraded Uptown Normal area.

fiscal jam — a fiscal jam that has been made worse by the village's aggressive use of TIFs. The village used TIF funds to purchase and lease back a school district office building. Providing back-door funding for schools was not the official purpose of this particular TIF district; worse in the eyes of lovers of local democracy, the arrangement was approved after the school district opted against asking its voters for more money in a referendum the district was likely to lose. In effect, owners of property within the TIF district end up funding school aid without having a chance to vote on it.

School districts are increasingly disinclined to wait patiently for TIF districts to expire to collect their share of the goodies. When Champaign's downtown TIF district breathed its last in 2005, for example, the General Assembly gave the city authority to extend it a further 12 years, as the law allows. Hard-up local schools collectively negotiated a fund-sharing agreement with the city under which any part of the TIF fund declared surplus to the TIF district's needs would be split by the schools and their fellow nonmunicipal taxing bodies.

Norm Sims, executive director of the

Illinois Tax Increment Association, notes that revenue sharing of this and other sorts is becoming much more common. So does Sen. Christine Radogno, a Lemont Republican and longtime TIF critic. "There is more sensitivity on the part of municipalities to be sure that everyone is taken care of," she says.

The deal ended the city of Champaign's political problem, and eased the schools' funding problem. Such arrangements create problems for the state of Illinois, however. By removing the future value of TIF property from the district's property tax base, a TIF district depresses the local resources available to the district to support itself, with the result that the district is entitled to more state school aid — enough in the case of Champaign Community Unit School District 4 to make up roughly 80 percent of what is lost to the TIF.

The city and the district could have negotiated what's known as a carve-out, in which parcels of land that have been developed are removed from the TIF district and put back on the tax rolls while leaving the rest of the TIF district intact. City halls don't particularly like this — it is the tax increment from such

properties that fund its TIF after all. But schools don't like it either. A carve-out would, by putting those properties back on the rolls, boost the equalized assessed value of the District 4 property tax base, with the result that the state would cut aid; money remitted to local governments by TIF districts through intergovernmental agreements, however, is not counted as part of their local effort under the state school aid formula.

"It's free money they don't have to count," says Radogno. "As the use of TIFs becomes more common — when you put it all together, what's this doing to the state aid formula?"

TIF, in short, has proven a great tool with which municipalities can rob Peter to pay themselves. In Oak Park, for example, local officials estimate that 13 percent of the property taxes collected goes to taxing jurisdictions outside the village. As one Oak Park official derisively noted, that's hundreds of thousands of dollars a year of other people's money that the village gets to play with. Unfortunately, much of it belongs to Cook County, which needs it to pay for programs such as public health and corrections that affluent Oak Parkers

seldom use, and, more important, that poor Cook Countians need very much.

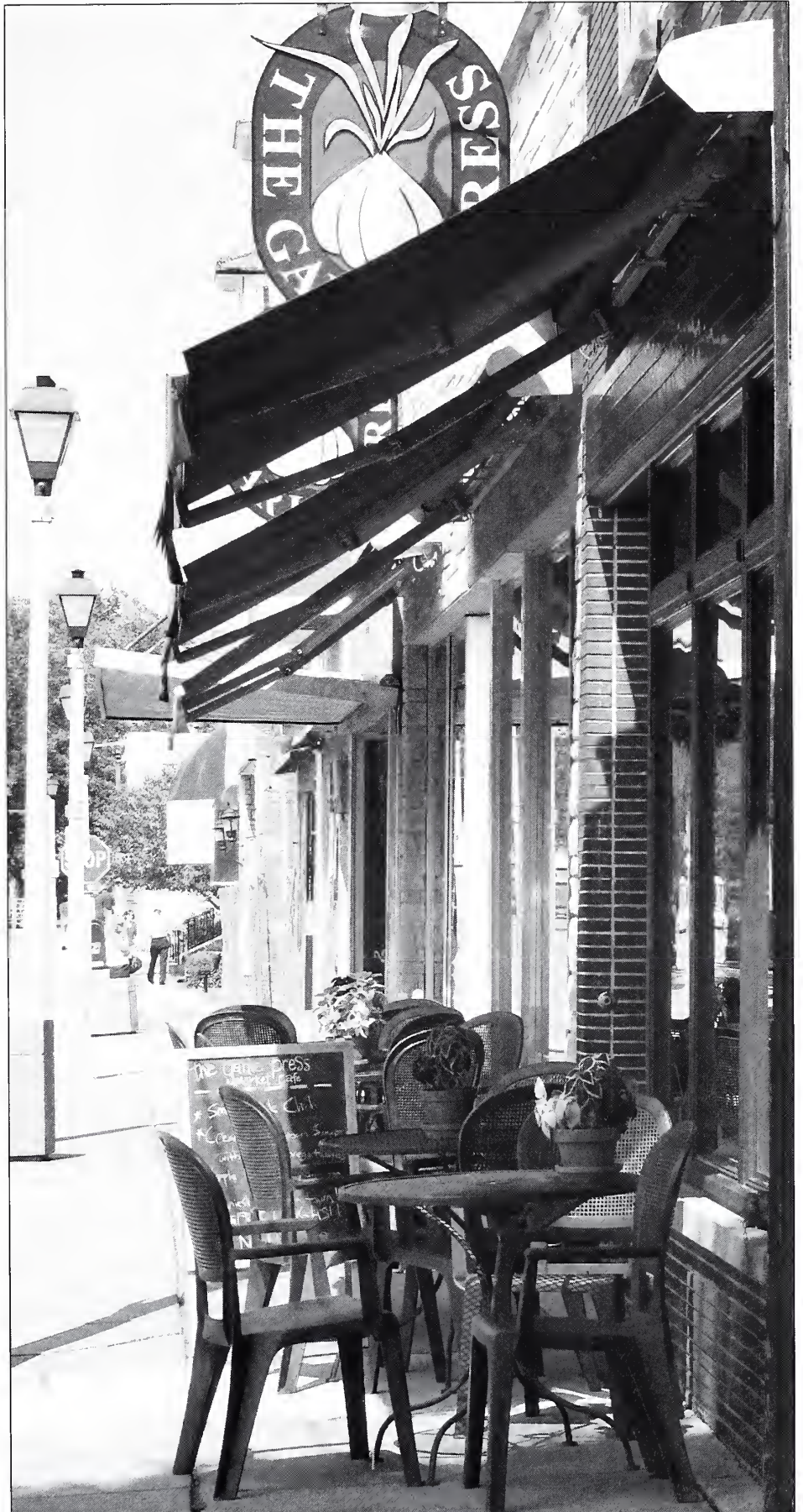
It's easy to cast mayors as villains in TIF dramas — indeed, it is often politically necessary. But that is oversimple. Some mayors do exploit TIF to play sugar daddy, but if some mayors get too cozy with developers, well, maybe it's because developers, unlike lawmakers in Springfield and Washington, deliver the goods that mayors need to run their cities. These days the successful mayor is the mayor who thinks and acts like a CEO. At a minimum, a revenue system that rewards local leaders whose allegiance is to the bottom line and who regard voters as mere shareholders means a further penetration of business culture into the civic realm.

Reforms in the form of caps on the amount of tax increment, more detailed budgeting and a passel of transparency measures have been proposed. Radogno is among those who would like a whole new program, what she has nicknamed "TIF Lite," in which municipalities would take perhaps only half the new property tax increment or take it for fewer years.

Does the process need to be more transparent? Yes. More accountable? Yes? Does it need to be trimmed back à la Radogno? Probably. But it won't happen. Of course Illinois' system of funding local governments is not rational, efficient or fair, but that's the sort of thing they worry about in Wisconsin or Minnesota. A formidable array of clout — developers, attorneys, municipal officials — likes the TIF law just the way it is. TIF, says Radogno, "is the only law that has its own lobbying association."

Not even TIF's fiercest critics want to see it abolished. TIF is a useful tool when used appropriately by responsible public officials. The fact that the Illinois TIF program is not transparent and is not accountable and has lax standards is not because it's a TIF program, but because it's an Illinois program. We let insurance companies decide health care policy instead of doctors, and unions set education policy and power companies set energy policy. Why not let developers set local government finance policy? □

James Krohe Jr. is a veteran commentator on Illinois public policy issues and a frequent contributor to Illinois Issues.



TIF funding allowed redevelopment in Uptown Normal, including the Garlic Press cafe.

CHANGES IN ILLINOIS' CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

Ex-speaker calls it quits



U.S. Rep.
J. Dennis Hastert

U.S. Rep. **J. Dennis Hastert** of Plano, who made history as the first Republican in a century to get a third term as House speaker, announced he won't run again from his 14th District.

"Together, we have made a difference," he told cheering supporters outside the Kendall County courthouse, according to an Associated Press account. "We have made history, and I thank you."

During his tenure as speaker, Hastert helped the George W. Bush Administration win approval of a set of tax cuts and a Medicare reform plan that included a complicated prescription benefit known as Part D. He lost his role as speaker to U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, in January when her party won a majority in the House.

Prior to his election as speaker, Hastert served as chief deputy majority whip. He was first elected to the U.S. House in 1986. Early in his career he was a high school teacher and wrestling coach.

Central Illinoisan to retire



U.S. Rep. Ray LaHood

U.S. Rep. **Ray LaHood**, a Peoria native, announced he will retire when his term ends in January 2009. That leaves the seat open for the 2008 general election, when the nation also will elect a new president.

The former teacher will have spent 14 years representing the 18th District, which encompasses 20 counties in central and western Illinois. His predecessor Bob Michel held the seat for 30 years.

LaHood says the race to replace him will present Republicans with a challenge, but the district is predominantly Republican and the GOP should benefit from high voter turnout in a presidential election year with an early primary.

"I'm glad I'm able to say I'm going out at the highest level that I can both politically and

professionally," he said at a news conference in late July.

Of his tenure, he says he's proudest of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield. "It was done in a collaborative way. I think part of what I'll be remembered for is that I've been willing to work with Democrats."

Ryan conviction upheld

A federal appeals court affirmed the public corruption convictions of former Gov. **George Ryan** and friend **Lawrence Warner** last month. In a 2-1 decision, the U.S. 7th Circuit Court of Appeals said Ryan and Warner received a fair trial despite some controversy over the dismissal of two jurors. The separate appeals on their prison sentences, six and one-half years for Ryan and nearly three and one-half years for Warner, are ongoing.

Indictments

Donald Snyder Jr., former director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, was indicted on federal charges of receiving about \$50,000 in illegal kickbacks from two lobbyists who represented health care companies holding large contracts with the state. The indictments stem from a federal investigation, Operation Safe Road, which led to the corruption conviction of former Gov. **George Ryan**. The former governor appointed Snyder of Pittsfield to his post, which he held from 1999 to 2003.

"As a top state official, Mr. Snyder was bound by various rules governing his acceptance of favors of any kind," said U.S. attorney Patrick Fitzgerald in a release. "He was forbidden from receiving cash kickbacks from anyone, much less lobbyists representing companies doing millions of dollars in business with [corrections]."

The two lobbyists also were indicted.

John Robinson of Barrington Hills in northern Illinois represented an Illinois-based company that held a multimillion-dollar contract with the state to provide health care services for inmates. He also is a former Cook County undersheriff. Between 1996 and 2003, he allegedly arranged a contract with the health

care company to receive \$2,500 a month in addition to 5 percent of the company's income from contracts with the corrections department. The indictment says Robinson expected to get an increased payment of \$4,500 a month as soon as the health care company's state contract exceeded \$4 million.

Larry Sims of Pleasant Plains in central Illinois represented a Pennsylvania health care company that also held multimillion-dollar contracts with the corrections department. He allegedly schemed with Snyder and Robinson to file false statements with the state to hide the illegal payments to Snyder.

Snyder and Robinson were each charged with five counts of mail fraud, one carrying a maximum sentence of one year in prison and four others carrying up to 20 years in prison. Sims was charged with one count of perjury for allegedly lying to a grand jury during the investigation, an offense carrying a maximum punishment of five years in prison. The indictment also seeks \$50,000 from Snyder.

If convicted, all three also could have to pay a \$250,000 fine on each count.

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

Central Illinois lawmaker enlists



State Rep.
Jim Watson

State Rep. **Jim Watson**, a Jacksonville Republican who has served in the legislature since 2001, was identified in a National Conference of State Legislatures survey as one of six state lawmakers who enlisted after being elected. In May, Watson re-enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves. The national conference survey by Hawaii Rep. K. Mark Takai found a total of 68 state legislators who serve in the U.S. military.

Watson says he felt the need to do more as his former civil service unit based in Camp Pendleton, Calif., was called to its third tour of duty in the Middle East. "I don't think we can sit back and let the same guys carry the water over and over and over."

He's committed to one year and was expected to attend drill one weekend a month at Camp Pendleton. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps and Marine Corps Reserves from 1985 to 1991, including one year in Iraq during Operation Desert Storm. If his unit were mobilized, he says he would be in a combat environment teaching local officials how to run their government, setting up the hospitals or trying to rebuild the infrastructure for an education system.

From an R to a D

State Rep. **Paul Froehlich** of Schaumburg joined the Democrats after considering himself a "lifelong Republican." He served as Schaumburg Township Republican Committeeman since 1998, and also resigned from that panel.



State Rep.
Paul Froehlich

"I became a Republican because the party permitted a broad range of views and welcomed moderates with open arms," he said in a printed release. "Over the last six years, that has changed. I, however, have not. The same beliefs I held last week, I hold today."

His constituents in the northwest suburbs of Chicago are leaning more Democratic. But House Minority Leader Tom Cross says he's likely to target Froehlich in the fall election campaigns "just like I will in all the races where I think that we have a chance, and clearly I think we have a chance there."

Mount Prospect lawmaker to retire

State Rep. **Carolyn Krause**, a Mount Prospect Republican, announced she won't run for re-election to the Illinois House. She is retiring after serving in the House since 1993.

"Carolyn Krause was an excellent lawmaker who passionately looked out for the interests of the suburbs," said House Republican Leader Tom Cross in a printed release. "She was the point person for the House Republican caucus on many complex issues."

Krause's announcement comes in time to give potential candidates a chance to meet filing deadlines for an early February primary.

Danville lawmaker to "step aside"

State Rep. **Willam "Bill" Black**, a Danville Republican, announced he will "not actively seek" another term in the Illinois House, where he has served since 1986.

In a printed statement, he said the new law moving the primary to February "prompted" his decision. "I believe the campaign season is already too long and too expensive, which is one reason it is time for me to step aside."

Black noted he is the longest serving member of the House Republican leadership team. He has served as floor leader since 1991. He used that forum during the heated overtime budget debate to call on Gov. Rod Blagojevich to "govern."

REINSTATED

Dawn DeFraties and **Michael Casey**, two state employees who were fired, must be reinstated, a Sangamon County judge ordered in August.

Carl Draper, the attorney for the two, argued that the Illinois Civil Service Commission lost its authority to hear more testimony after that state panel took too long to make a decision based on the first round of evidence.

The commission had 60 days to rule. By law, when the commission missed its deadline, DeFraties and Casey had to be reinstated with full compensation of salaries and benefits lost during the year they were out of work, Draper argued.

DeFraties and Casey, who worked for the state's Central Management Services agency, were fired in 2006 by Gov. Rod Blagojevich for allegedly giving favorable treatment to politically connected job applicants.

New spokeswoman

Rikeesha Cannon has been hired as the Chicago-based spokeswoman for the Illinois Department of Human Services. The position had previously been vacant. The Peoria native, who is a former graduate assistant for *Illinois Issues* magazine, worked for two years as the media relations director for the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law.

OBIT

Phillip Shaw Paludan

The nationally recognized Lincoln scholar based at the University of Illinois at Springfield died August 1. He was 69.

Paludan, Naomi B. Lynn Distinguished Chair in Lincoln Studies since 2001, won the prestigious Lincoln Prize for his 1994 book *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln*.

"We are only just beginning to comprehend how much we'll miss him," UIS Chancellor Richard Ringeisen said in a printed release.

"It was a great privilege to count him among our faculty and to know him for the exceptional human being that he was."



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Letters to the Editor

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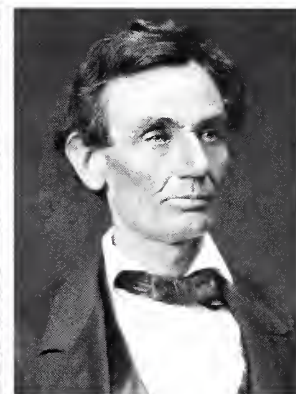
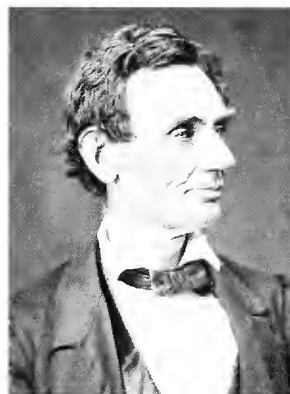
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Limited Edition Hesler prints now available

Alexander Hesler's companion portraits of presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln, taken in Springfield on June 3, 1860, are stunning photographs. Exposed on 8" x 10" light-sensitive glass plates, the images are among the most eloquent and revealing of Illinois' greatest statesman before he left Springfield for Washington.



The Illinois State Historical Society acquired the glass plate positives (the original negatives are in the Smithsonian, damaged beyond repair) and has commissioned archive-quality prints of the Hesler portraits.

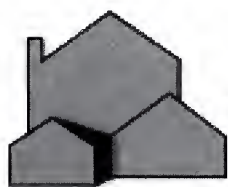
In anticipation of the Lincoln Bicentennial in 2009, The Society now offers a limited edition (500) of the 16" x 20" Hesler Lincoln Portraits (shown above), double matted and beautifully framed (choice of natural wood or gilt) with non-glare glass and adorned with a simple brass plate: A. Lincoln, June 3, 1860. The photographs are sold only in pairs for \$1,000, plus shipping and applicable sales tax for non-members.

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Charles N. Wheeler III



The dysfunctional Ds set new standards for governing incompetence

by Charles N. Wheeler III

As the seemingly interminable spring legislative session drags on through the dog days of summer and lawmakers begin circulating petitions for re-election, Democratic lawmakers can't be enthusiastic about the record compiled by their leaders.

Despite controlling all the levers of the lawmaking machinery — the governorship and majorities in both the Senate and the House — the dysfunctional Ds set new standards for governing incompetence.

The party failed in its most essential task, approving a state budget for the fiscal year that began July 1. Instead, more than two months passed before a spending plan was sent to Gov. Rod Blagojevich — after it was hammered out in negotiations among legislative leaders of both parties with little input from the governor.

Blagojevich's prize initiative, universal health care, fell by the wayside, as did his proposal for the largest tax increase in state history to pay for it.

Similarly grandiose schemes to lease the state lottery and to borrow billions to shore up pension systems met the same fate, leaving Illinois still facing the largest pension debt in the nation.

Hopes of reforming the state's system of financing public preschool through 12th grade were snuffed out, largely because of the governor's steadfast refusal to accept higher income tax rates in return for reduced property taxes.

Against that dreary backdrop, ever-optimistic reformers are promoting tougher ethics legislation as a good way to diminish voter disdain and a first step in rebuilding public trust.

Also stalled were plans for expanded gaming, including a Chicago casino, strongly championed by Senate President Emil Jones Jr. as a means to pump dollars into local schools and to bankroll public works projects such as roads, bridges and classroom buildings.

Meanwhile, mass transit riders in the Chicago area face stiff fare hikes and deep service cuts, thanks to lawmakers' inability to agree on a relief plan, thwarted in part by Blagojevich's opposition to a local sales tax hike.

Lawmakers managed to hash out a plan to provide some relief for electric customers shocked by soaring bills after a 10-year rate freeze expired, but homeowners and small businesses are likely to find the help too little and too late. Moreover, the governor's dithering on the measure may cost rate payers tens of millions of dollars more.

Much of the blame for the dismal record stems from an ongoing power

struggle pitting Blagojevich and Jones against House Speaker Michael Madigan. Although all three have deep roots in the Chicago Democratic Machine, longtime legislative observers can't recall a more poisoned atmosphere among leaders, with a trust level roughly akin to that between the Likud and Hamas.

So how would you like to run as a Democratic incumbent on that dubious record of achievement? One can crow only so much about moving the primary date to February, or letting the telephone industry get into cable TV or making it harder for teens to get driver's licenses, in hopes voters will forget about the nearly 10 percent, retroactive pay raises for lawmakers and other top state officials, including Blagojevich.

Nor should minority Republicans gloat — enraged and disgusted voters may well paint all lawmakers with the same brush, saying a pox on both their houses, opening the door for primary challengers and for candidates of the state's third major party, the Greens.

Against that dreary backdrop, ever-optimistic reformers are promoting tougher ethics legislation as a good way to diminish voter disdain and a first step in rebuilding public trust.

They note that exit polling following last November's election found 86 percent of respondents said corruption was very or extremely important to them, so they reason voters would welcome any effort to limit the opportunities for graft.

Their focus is on a measure intended to curb Illinois' venerable tradition of pay-to-play politics, a system under which major campaign contributors somehow or other seem to get lucrative state contracts. Current practitioners — most notably the Blagojevich Administration — argue it's all a coincidence, that there's no connection between big bucks for the campaign coffers and big bucks for the donor's bank account. Maybe so, but that's not the public perception, as anyone who regularly reads letters to the editor or political blogs knows.

Under the plan, business owners with more than \$25,000 in state contracts would be barred from contributing to the officeholders awarding the contracts. In addition, contractors bidding on work worth \$10,000 or more would be required to disclose contributions to the officeholder during the prior two years. A final provision would prohibit state officers, employees and their spouses from profiting from state contracts and bond sales.

The proposal, HB 1, cleared the House on April 25 by a 116-0 vote — the other two representatives had excused absences

Their focus is on a measure intended to curb Illinois' venerable tradition of pay-to-play politics, a system under which major campaign contributors somehow or other seem to get lucrative state contracts.

for the day — and moved to the Senate, where 46 of the 59 senators have signed on as co-sponsors. In addition, five of the six constitutional officers — everyone but the governor — have endorsed the legislation, so one would assume its passage was pretty much a slam dunk.

One would be mistaken, however. The bill landed in the Senate Rules Committee, which must clear legislation for further action, where it has languished for more than four months. The roadblock is Jones, who controls the Rules Commit-

tee and decides whether legislation advances. Officially, the Jones camp says the president wants stronger legislation and is working on more sweeping reforms, but the suspicion is that the Senate president has bottled up the bill because his ally Blagojevich does not want any restrictions placed on his formidable ability to raise campaign cash.

A cynical view unfair to Jones and Blagojevich? Perhaps, but one easily countered if Jones allows a vote on the measure and saves further reform for a later day.

"Legislators need to take a look at themselves and say, 'What can we do to restore a sense of public trust?'" says Cindi Canary, director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, a longtime advocate for good government. "This bill won't solve every problem, but if they don't do something, it will be fairly unforgivable." □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

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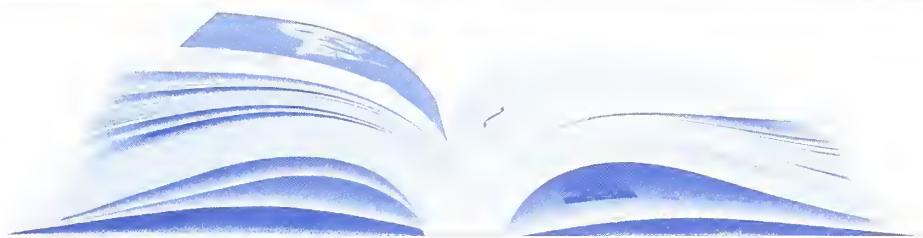
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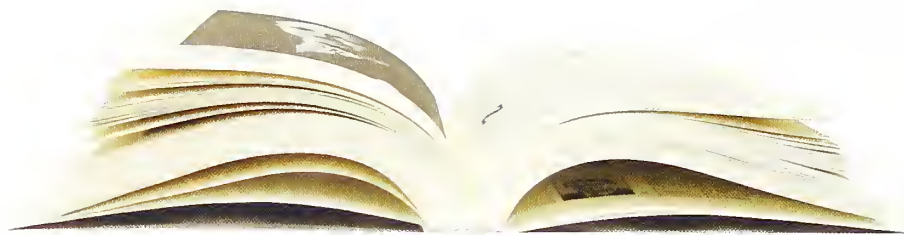


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